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NANCY LEE

MARGARET WARDE

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"WE'RE VERY GLAD TO SEE YOU"

NANCY LEE

By

MARGARET WARDE

Author of
The "Betty Wales' Books" Etc.

Illustrated by
Pemberton Ginther

THE PENN PUBLISHING
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Introduction

Readers of the "Betty Wales" books all know that Betty Wales has grown up, changing from a merry, happy-go-lucky college freshman into a full-fledged married young lady. And her friends have grown up too, some being married, like Betty, while others are "bachelor maids." And so, as the tale of Betty's girlhood is finished, here is the first book about another girl,—a jolly girl, with yellow curls like Betty's, and a way of smiling at life, no matter what happens to her, that wins her a lot of friends—and a habit of being most dreadfully careless. I have an idea that some real girls who read about Nancy will like her all the better because she has her faults.

This is the story of Nancy's first experience at boarding-school, and next will come a book called "Nancy Lee's Spring Term," which will tell more about the fun that Nancy and the Terrible Twins and Lloyd and Kittie and the rest had at Fair Oaks School, how hard they worked for some of it, and all about Timmy. Who is Timmy? Well, that's in the other story.

Margaret Warde.

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Nancy Lee.

Nancy Lee

CHAPTER I

ROOMMATES

Nancy Lee, slim, yellow-haired, with laughing gray eyes and a dimple in her chin, balanced herself deftly on the swaying arms of a rocking-chair, slipped a wire over a hook on an inconveniently high picture-moulding, and jumped down just in time to escape a tumble.

"There, Gracie," she announced to a thin, dark girl who was watching her gloomily from the window-seat, "that's done, for all you said it couldn't be without a ladder. Do you like it where it is, or shall I risk my valuable life on that chair again and move it just a speck to the left?"

"Oh, no, it's well enough as it is," returned the dark-haired girl rather ungraciously. "But—please don't call me Gracie."

Nancy Lee knit her smooth brows and stared in blank amazement at Miss Grace Allen, whom fate had ordained to be her roommate at Fair Oaks School for Girls. But after a moment her gray

eyes began to dance and the dimple in her chin deepened.

"All right," she said, "I won't. I ought to have asked first, of course, but I thought—if we're to room together for a year, we've got to begin on first names some time. So why not now, when we're both feeling new and strange, and as homesick as stray kittens? I hate being called Miss Lee. It sounds so grown up and so proper." Nancy made a wry face to show what she thought about being grown up and proper. "So call me Nancy, please, or Nance or Nan, or whatever you like, and I'll call you anything you say."

"Well,—Grace, if you want to," suggested the roommate grudgingly. "Gracie is so silly."

"Of course, except among one's little friends," agreed Nancy absently. "Isn't this room the most spick-and-span young study you ever saw? It will never look so neat again, I'm sure, as long as I occupy half of it; so let's go and find some people to come in and admire our arrangements."

"Your bedroom isn't in order yet," objected Grace Allen.

Nancy slammed a door noisily. "Now it won't show. I couldn't attack that mess to-night if my life depended on it. I feel just terribly social."

"Everybody else will be busy unpacking," objected Grace again. "And besides ——"

"Go ahead," prompted Nancy good-naturedly.

"I think it would be better to wait, since we're both new here, and let other people call on us first."

Nancy laughed. "A lovely lonesome time we should have if everybody did that. I won't disgrace you by my freshness, truly I won't. We'll just go down to the room at the end of the corridor. Some new girls have it, I know, because I heard Miss Marshall say so to the maid who brought me up here. They're probably as tired and cross and homesick as we are, and maybe one of them is that terribly cute child that sat next to Miss Marshall at dinner."

"Thank you, but I prefer to stay here," Grace told her coldly. "I'm tired, though I certainly wasn't aware of being cross, and I'm not a bit homesick. But I do wish you wouldn't keep talking about it," she added sharply.

"I won't so much as mention it again," Nancy promised very solemnly, for even her stout and merry heart was appalled at the thought of getting along with a roommate who "took you up" as often and as vigorously as did Miss Allen. "I'm always saying and doing the wrong things," she went on humbly, "as you'll find out before we've roomed together long. But I don't mean to be disagreeable—truly I don't. Now I'll tell you what! You stay here while I go on a tour of investiga-

tion. If I can rummage out some nice, jolly girls, I'll bring them back to see the room and meet you." And without waiting for any more wet blankets Nancy Lee was out in the dim corridor, striding down it with an easy swing that was her mute protest against the fussy, stand-on-all-the-proprieties manner of her new roommate.

Half-way down the hall, Nancy, head in air and thoughts on the good times they would all be having at home this evening, stumbled over something which gave an agitated little squeal and tumbled apart at her feet.

"Oh, dear!" cried Nancy, peering at it through the dimness, and discovering it to be composed of a very small girl, and two vast armfuls of petticoats, pillows, tennis racquets, and miscellaneous bric-à-brac, which the small girl had been fishing up from the depths of a huge wicker trunk.

"Please let me help you pick them up," begged Nancy. "You see it's really very dark here, and I'm a new girl and ——"

"So am I," confided the small person on the floor. "Isn't this unpacking business just simply awful? Have you a roommate?"

Nancy stopped gathering up wreckage to point back at the open door of her study. "Yes. We have those rooms. Where do you live?"

"Right down here," explained the small girl,

scrambling to her feet and leading the way to the suite at the end of the hall, which had been Nancy's original destination. In the light Nancy recognized her as the girl who had sat next but one to her at dinner—a very dainty, trig little creature, her hair elaborately waved and puffed, and her white dress a mass of filmy lace and fine embroidery. Free-and-easy Nancy had surveyed her furbelowed elegance with keen disfavor, and resented the supercilious air with which she had received the timid advances of the fat, homely girl who sat between them, and who had evidently stopped crying barely in time to appear at dinner. But in a plain blue kimono, with the objectionable puffs a good deal damaged by her tumble in the dark and her haughty air changed to one of distinct friendliness, the next neighbor but one was not so bad, Nancy decided quickly. She showed Nancy where to put down her burden, sighed a relieved sigh when Nancy tactfully insisted that she preferred the floor to a chair—they were all piled high with the débris of unpacking—sat down herself Turk-fashion, and opened the conversation in a businesslike way by demanding Nancy's name and home address.

"Manchester, Massachusetts," she repeated, with a deep sigh. "Now why couldn't I have had a roommate from a civilized place like that? You

don't remember my name either, do you? Miss Marshall just wasted her time, introducing us all like that, in a heap. I'm Katherine Westervelt, and I live in New York. All my friends call me Kittie, and you must too. I'm sure we shall be good friends right away. I noticed you at dinner and made up my mind to that," ended Kittie breathlessly.

"Really?" laughed Nancy. "I didn't progress nearly so far as you did. I just tried to get a general idea of my future neighbors, and pitied that poor homesick Miss Smith that sat between us,—and I ate lots and lots of dinner. I was as hungry as a bear after unpacking all the afternoon."

"Oh, have your trunks come?" demanded Kittie. "I supposed they hadn't, because you ——"

"Came to dinner in a mussy shirt-waist," laughed Nancy. "You see I was just in the midst of picture-hanging when the dressing bell rang, so I didn't bother to change. Clothes are such a fuss when you're busy."

"I'm never too busy to care how I look," said Kittie, patting the rumpled puffs anxiously. "Yes, I'm sure we shall be friends. I'm very quick to make up my mind about people,—and my first impressions are nearly always right," she added with a comical air of superiority.

"I hope we shall be friends, I'm sure," said Nancy pleasantly. As a matter of fact she hoped and expected to be friends with all the Fair Oaks girls, so what was the use of making such a tremendous fuss about it? "Where's your roommate?" she asked.

Kittie sighed again—sighing seemed to be her favorite mode of expression. "I'm sure I can't imagine. She was here a few minutes ago." She uncurled her feet, jumped up, and went softly from one to another of the bedroom doors. "She isn't around here now, that's certain," she announced, shutting the outside door to the study and seating herself again sociably near to her guest. "You should just see her, Nancy Lee, and then you'd pity me as I deserve."

"Didn't I see her at dinner?" asked Nancy practically.

"Yes, of course. She sat up at the other end of the table—big and terribly tanned and awkward. Wore her hair skinned straight back, and her clothes look as if they came out of the Ark. But about the worst thing is her name," ended Kittie tearfully. "Lloyd Mallory sounds so common and like—like a boy's. And they wrote me that I was going to room with Helena Curtis." Kittie wiped away a few tears furtively with her kimono sleeve.

"Don't give up the ship yet," Nancy consoled her bluffly. "Names don't amount to much that I can see. Of course it would have been more fun to room with a friend ——"

"Oh, Helena Curtis wasn't a friend," interposed Kittie hastily. "But her name sounded so sweet and aristocratic and—well, my kind, you know. I'm sure I should have loved her. And I just hate big, awkward girls with boys' names and no manners,—that live in the wilds." Kittie winked back more tears and gulped down a sob.

"Where does this Lloyd Mallory live?" demanded Nancy.

"In Washington, on a ranch."

"In Washington, on a ranch! Why, how funny!" laughed Nancy.

"Washington, U. S., not D. C.," gulped Kittie. "Just think how lovely if it had been Washington, D. C., and her father had been a senator!"

"I can't see why you care," said Nancy firmly. She was always exasperated by woes that seemed to her imaginary, and she began to wish that she had taken her roommate's advice and stayed at home.

"We all have our ideals, I suppose," returned Kittie plaintively—she was evidently enjoying Nancy's visit, if Nancy was not. "And how mine have been shattered since I arrived here! Why,

I chose Fair Oaks School because the catalogue said 'thirtieth year,' and I thought it would be in a lovely old house in the middle of an oak forest. And now look at it!" Kittie made a dramatic gesture in the direction of a big pile of shoes. "Not an oak tree in sight, and the buildings are all the ugliest, squarest kind of brand-new red brick horrors. Oh, dear!" Kittie dissolved at last in a flood of tears.

Nancy watched her helplessly for a moment. Then, "Are you as homesick as all that?" she demanded. "Because if so, I pity you from the bottom of my heart, and I'll do anything I can to make you feel better."

"No, I'm not exactly homesick," wailed Kittie. "It's just that things all seem to go wrong."

"I think it's much too soon to decide about that," Nancy told her sternly. "Some big, awkward girls are lots of fun, and for my part I'd rather have the school in nice new buildings on a pretty street than in ramshackle old ones off in a spooky oak grove. Anyhow, I believe in making the best of things." Having thus proclaimed her optimistic gospel, Nancy stood up and pulled the unresisting Kittie to her feet. "It's much too soon to decide how you like anything yet—even me. So bathe your face and then come and see how pretty our study is. As I didn't take time to dress for

dinner, we've got it all in order. My roommate is there alone, and she's on the shady edge of homesick—or maybe it's just that she's like you,—inclined to look on the dark side of things. Anyhow, let's go and cheer her up."

"Wait a minute," begged Kittie. "Do you like her—specially, I mean?"

"Why, no, n-not specially perhaps, so far."

"Then why not change? Let's ask Miss Marshall to put us together, and your roommate with mine. I'm perfectly sure we should suit each other."

Nancy considered swiftly. Kittie Westervelt was rather silly, but she seemed easy enough to get on with. At least she hadn't an inexhaustible assortment of chips on her shoulder like Grace Allen.

"No," she said at last decisively, "I don't think we can do that. Somebody's feelings would be hurt in the shuffle, and we don't want to start the year that way. Besides,"—Nancy dimpled,—"as far as I've tried it, which is since this noon, I think being roommates is a good deal of a strain on being friends. I couldn't possibly be agreeable through another unpacking and choosing bedrooms and sides of the study and sites for my dear, dear pictures. No, we've just got to like things the way they are. Are you ready?"

Kittie was still dabbling water on her reddened eyelids when Lloyd Mallory threw open the study door. With a short, old-fashioned cape over her broad shoulders she looked taller and more awkward than ever. She threw a bluff "Hello" to Nancy, and swept the disorder of the room with an amused glance.

"I thought she'd have it all fixed by the time I got back," she explained, with a nod toward Kittie's bedroom. "But instead it's worse than ever. It's certainly lucky that I didn't bring along a lot of traps, or we should have to burrow passages through from door to door."

"I should die if I had to sleep in a cell," called back Kittie feelingly.

Lloyd grinned and led the way to her bedroom. There was one picture over the small white bed, one photograph on the dresser. A riding whip hung from a nail on the closet door. It was the plainest, barest, neatest bedroom imaginable, and it just fitted Lloyd Mallory. Nancy said so, and invited Lloyd to join her and Kittie on their visit to her study. In the corridor they met the fat, homely girl, who had evidently been crying again since dinner; and in spite of a warning nudge from Kittie Nancy asked her to come too. Grace Allen had not, apparently, found her chosen solitude very agreeable, for she greeted Nancy's new friends

cordially, received their enthusiastic approval of the study in good part, and even insisted that Nancy should have credit for most of the hard work that had gone into arranging it.

They were still exchanging confidences and condolences about the labors of unpacking and the general discomforts of first days at boarding-school, when another girl walked through the hall. Nancy thought that she detected a forlorn droop to her slender shoulders and a wistful look in her big brown eyes, and she called out a cordial, "Come in and join us, won't you?"

The girl in the hall paused, hesitated, and came in with a rather frightened little air that reassured Nancy about her being an "old girl" with plenty of friends of her own and a fine contempt for the homesick hospitality of newcomers.

"Were you at dinner?" Kittie demanded presently of the last arrival.

The girl shook her head. "I came just too late."

"Then let me introduce you to everybody," Kittie offered with the patronizing air of the social expert. "This is Nancy Lee, and Lloyd Mallory, and Grace Allen, and"—wrinkling her brows at the fat, homely girl—"oh, yes, Mary Smith. Nobody ought to forget that name. I'm Kittie Westervelt, and you're ——"

"LET ME INTRODUCE YOU"

"Margery Dutton," supplied the last arrival, blushing quite unnecessarily.

"What a pretty name!" cried Kittie enthusiastically. "May we call you Margery? We've all decided to begin right off on first names."

"Oh, it's nice of you to want to be friendly," began Miss Dutton confusedly. "But I'm afraid —you see I'm not what you think. I'm a new teacher. I ought to have said so when I first came in."

A constrained silence fell upon the group. In a minute Nancy laughed—she couldn't help it. Then Miss Dutton laughed too, and said that she felt very young and brisk and must be going back to her room; and she thanked them all for letting her join their cheerful circle.

"We're very glad you came," Nancy told her prettily. "Now we can go to sleep knowing that there's at least one teacher here that we're perfectly sure to like; and that's a great comfort."

"Isn't she dear?" cried enthusiastic Kittie the minute she had gone.

"She's never taught before, I guess."

"Do new teachers ever feel forlorn and homesick, I wonder?"

Just then a gong rang, and Kittie jumped up with a wail of despair. "Nine o'clock, and my bed is heaped with dresses. I can't manage to get

undressed, and put my hair in curlers, in less than half an hour. The idea of having to be in bed at half-past nine!"

"Just let the curlers go," advised Nancy easily; but Kittie clutched her puffs and cried out a dramatic "Never!" as she rushed back to the scene of her labors.

Lloyd followed her with friendly offers of help, while Mary Smith lingered to say an embarrassed "Thank you" to Nancy.

"Come again whenever you feel like talking," Nancy told her. "I don't believe I should exactly like to room alone as you do."

"Shouldn't you?" asked Grace Allen scornfully as Mary departed. "Well, so long as you don't, wouldn't it be better for us to consult each other before issuing any more such wholesale invitations?"

Without waiting for Nancy to answer, she disappeared into her bedroom and shut the door softly but firmly upon an irreproachable "good-night."

Nancy could undress in five minutes, if necessary. She sat down in the Morris chair, stretched like a sleepy cat, yawned, smiled, reached for her new red journal, and wrote at the top of the first page:

"My roommate, Grace Allen, is like Brother

Dick's alarm clock. She goes off when you least expect it. I guess the best way to manage her is to leave her alone.

"Boarding-school seems to be kind of mixed so far, and very queer. I guess I shall like it, if it likes me.

("'Kind of' is wrong, and so is 'guess,' but I hate to spoil the looks of this page by changing.")

Nancy read over what she had written, yawned again, put away her book, and opened her bedroom door, frowning at the confused prospect it disclosed.

"I'll get up before breakfast and put things to rights," she promised herself, "and then I'll keep them straight, no matter what happens. I promised mother that I'd try hard to learn to be more orderly this year."

She grinned as a new idea struck her. "I shouldn't wonder if Grace Allen kept me to it," she reflected. "She acts as neat as a pin. Well, that will be one good thing about her, anyhow."

Nancy tied back her yellow hair with a wide pink ribbon, and grinned again as she remembered Kittie's puffs.

"I almost think Lloyd Mallory is the nicest one I've seen yet," she decided. "But I haven't seen many. I wish it was to-morrow. I'm sick of waiting for things to begin."

CHAPTER II

TWINS AND TRIANGLES

To-morrow came rather sooner, on the whole, than sleepy Nancy Lee found quite convenient, and things began with a promptness and vigor that exactly suited her energetic little soul.

Fair Oaks School for Girls was a flourishing and progressive institution. That was why there were no oak trees on the new campus, to which the school had been moved, having outgrown its time-honored quarters, two years before the literal-minded Kittie Westervelt was enrolled among its pupils. Nevertheless, a prettier campus for its size it would have been hard to imagine. The big dormitory, where Nancy and Kittie and the rest of the new girls had rooms, and all the school ate, faced the street and almost completely shut in the campus from observation. Behind it the school grounds spread out in the form of a wedge, with wide gravel walks leading to the two recitation buildings, the two cottage dormitories, and the gymnasium. A winding carriage road went on still further to the athletic field, which stretched off, green and elm-shaded, dotted with tennis and

squash courts and a basket-ball field, to the edge of a pretty little lake. There a tiny but artistic boat-house completed the list of the Fair Oaks buildings. Practically nothing of all this could be seen from the dormitory windows, and even the optimistic Nancy Lee had never, in her wildest moments of making the best of being bundled off to boarding-school a year sooner than she had expected, dreamed of having such a splendid place in which to spend her play-hours.

She discovered it all immediately after breakfast, having been tempted out for a stroll by the lovely October sunshine ; and when she had made a hasty tour of inspection she rushed back to tell Kittie, who had caught cold the night before and had appeared at the breakfast table looking quite forlorn and dispirited.

"Come out and see how pretty it is," Nancy begged. "There's still ten minutes before we have to report to Miss Marshall, and the grounds are just full of girls. It's lots of fun."

Kittie was putting some finishing touches to her elaborate coiffure. "No, thank you. I had fresh air enough last night. My roommate opened all the windows and the wind blew a regular gale."

"Why didn't you shut your door?" asked Nancy.

"Because I'm afraid to sleep off by myself that

way. Oh, dear! I wish I'd thought to have my breakfast sent up. I've got the dearest little breakfast caps to wear in my room. Look!" Kittie held up a filmy affair of lace, with a coquettish pink bow over one ear.

"Very pretty," agreed Nancy carelessly, "but not for me, thanks. I hate staying in bed when I'm awake. I must go and find a pencil and a piece of paper to take to Assembly."

"I'll stop for you," Kittie called after her. "I've forgotten where she said to go."

So Nancy piloted Kittie and Mary Smith to their first Assembly—Grace Allen wasn't ready to go when they started, and Nancy decided that it was the part of discretion not to suggest waiting for her. On the way they were joined by a dark-skinned, merry-eyed girl who said that her name was Margaret Lewis, and that she hadn't a roommate or even a room—only a couch in a recess at the end of the hall.

"I'm in only because I came so far," she explained gaily. "Miss Marshall hadn't the heart to send me all the way back to Kansas City by my lonesome, just because Fair Oaks happens to be full."

"Hadn't you applied beforehand?" asked Kittie. "And didn't your mother come with you, to see that you were admitted all right?"

Margaret Lewis looked sober for a minute. "I came alone," she said. "My mother is dead, and my father is always very busy. So I'm used to looking out for myself."

"Oh!" said Kittie wonderingly. "But you can't sleep in a corner of the hall all the year."

"I could, I suppose," Margaret told her, "but Miss Marshall thinks somebody who has applied will drop out, or somebody who has started the year will be too homesick to stick it through. Shall I inherit the room of one of you, I wonder?" she inquired with a merry twinkle.

Mary Smith blushed very red, whereupon Kittie giggled unfeelingly, and Nancy came to the rescue by assuring Margaret Lewis that she needn't pin any hopes on her; having gone through the agony of putting her rooms in order she meant to stay and enjoy them.

Considering that nobody knew much of anybody else, and that almost everybody was what Nancy had called "on the shady edge of homesick," the new girls' Assembly ought to have been a quiet and dignified gathering. But it wasn't; it buzzed and clattered and clamored. In an instant it had swallowed up Nancy and her three companions, and they were buzzing and clattering and clamoring like the rest.

"She's cried quarts, and changed roommates

three times, and she won't let her father go back home until she's sure that she likes the one she's got now, and isn't going to be homesick again."

"They put you through a regular exam, I hear, on what you've learned before you came."

"Look at that infant in the doorway. Is this a kindergarten, please tell me, or isn't it?"

"Are there two Mary Smiths? Mary P. and Mary C.? Then we'll just call the fat Mary P. Plain Mary Smith. It's certainly appropriate, and it'll keep 'em straight."

"I don't mean to work hard here—time enough for that when you get to college."

"Who said she had a box of chocolates? Isn't candy against the rules, and goodies from home?"

"Does she really live on a ranch? Well, where does her dressmaker live? That's what I want to know."

"Rather nice lot on the whole, don't you think? Some infants and some freaks, but a lot of promising specimens."

"Seniors room in one cottage and juniors in the other. Most of the babies are day pupils, and they say the third floor of the big dormitory is all new girls."

"Sh! Here comes Miss Marshall. Isn't the slim little teacher behind her a perfect dear?"

Nancy proudly contributed the name of the perfect dear, and then sat still and listened hard to Miss Marshall's account of the school rules and the way new girls would be assigned to classes. It sounded simple enough to Nancy, but it called forth a perfect avalanche of bewildered inquiries, which Miss Marshall checked by assigning the girls to various teachers for consultations, and announcing that regular lessons would not begin till the next day.

And then, with a whole free afternoon ahead, in which to explore the campus, play tennis if you could find an opponent, and perhaps even go rowing on the lake, it had to rain! No little sprinkle that didn't matter much and might be over in a few minutes, but a regular all-the-rest-of-the-day downpour. And the morning had been so lovely! Nancy put her bedroom to rights—all but. It was queer that there were always half a dozen of Nancy's belongings that she just couldn't find a place for. It had been so at home, and it was so here. Nancy swept them impatiently into a pile on one of the chairs and came out into the study, where she wandered around restlessly, straightening pictures, staring aimlessly out the windows, writing her name in the new books she had bought at the little school store down next to Miss Marshall's office, and wishing she dared go

back there again to ask for her mail—for the third time since luncheon.

"Why don't you sit down and settle to something?" inquired Grace Allen finally. "It makes me nervous to have you tramping back and forth and moving the furniture around."

In subdued silence Nancy dropped down on the window-seat, where she sat perfectly still for at least two minutes. Then, unable to stand it any longer, she made a dash for the door, knocking a book off the table in her hasty passage.

"Come and get me when you've finished your letter," she called back, bound not to seem unfriendly. "That is, if you want to. I'm going to find the girl who lives in an alcove."

"She doesn't live in an alcove any more," cried a laughing voice from over a transom. "She only sleeps there. We've adopted her for daytimes. Come right in."

Nancy accepted the invitation and found herself alone in a small, square study, across the middle of which, about waist high, was stretched a stout piece of twine.

"Leap the barrier or crawl under," directed another voice, while Nancy stood hesitating and staring around her, trying to decide what made the room look so queer. Presently she saw, and burst into a merry laugh.

"What a good idea!" she cried, slipping under the string partition. "It might have been a little prettier if you had mixed your things up more, but it must be so dreadfully nice to be able to have your own half of the room just exactly as you want it."

By this time she had reached the door of the double bedroom. The two narrow beds were drawn close together in front of the window, and across them, half hidden in a mound of cushions, lay Margaret Lewis. On one side of her was a tall, lank girl with tawny wisps of hair in her eyes, and on the other, a short, plump one, who sat up politely when Nancy appeared and arranged a place for her in the pillows.

"We're very glad to see you," she said. She was the one who had called over the transom.

"Hello," smiled Margaret.

"Welcome to our city," added the tall girl, shaking the hair out of her eyes and passing a box of candy. She was the one who had urged Nancy to leap the barrier. "Dip into the eats," she went on sociably. "They're probably against the rules to-day, and certainly to-morrow, so I shall seek my downy in a large gob of gloom if any pieces are left over."

Nancy "dipped in" and surveyed the roommates curiously. "It's queer that you two hap-

pened to be put together when your tastes are so entirely different—according to the looks of the study, anyway."

The tall girl grinned. "Our great-grandfathers were fifty-sixth cousins, so it's a sort of family alliance."

"She's queer, but I love her still," put in the roly-poly roommate, smiling knowingly at Margaret.

"She's queerer, but I adore her," supplemented the other.

"They are really related," Margaret assured Nancy.

"As near as own cousins. Can you believe that?" asked the little roommate.

"We're sisters. We've prepared you gradually for the worst," amended the tall one.

"Twin sisters. That's the fatal truth."

"But she's a social butterfly."

"And she's a man-hater."

"She's domestic."

"She's athletic."

"She's afraid of cows."

"She's a dreadful tomboy."

"What one of us doesn't think of, the other does."

"So you'd better believe our story and like our looks, or some day you'll hear from us and wish you were a Franulated Mufflin."

"What's that?" asked Nancy calmly, relieved by the pause in the rather complicated duet the two roommates had been engaged upon.

"Something uncommonly uncouth and exceedingly unpleasant," the tall, lank girl told her. "Ever been to this kind of an arrangement before —meaning boarding-school?"

Nancy had not.

"Listen to that now. This is our fourth, ain't it, Christina darling? She's Christina Learned, and I'm Jane. We never like the same school, so we keep moving on. This year it was Christina's turn to choose, but I have a notion that I shall like her school better than she does. Can you row?"

Nancy nodded.

"And skate?"

Nancy loved skating. Her eyes danced as she realized what an ideal rink the lake would be in winter.

Tall, lank Jane once more shook the wisps of hair out of her eyes, and reached over Christina to pat Nancy's shoulder approvingly.

"You for mine," she announced briefly, and helped herself to the largest chocolate in the box. Whereupon little Christina took up the tale.

"Your slang gets worse every day, Jane Learned," she told her sister severely. Then, turning to Nancy, "You like to dance too, don't you? I knew

it! And you admire pretty clothes and have lots of nice boy friends. There now, Jane Learned, just listen to that. And aren't you afraid of cows and mice and that kind of thing? Not the least little wee bit? You are? How perfectly lovely! You see,"—she explained her ecstasy,—"most of Jane's friends think I'm a silly, and my friends think Jane is just a frightful tomboy. So we're always delighted when we find a nice all-around girl who'll like us both, and realize that in spite of being so different we love each other dearly."

"And when we find one, we always form a Triangle," added Jane. "Meaning a select society of three kindred spirits."

"We both thought you looked congenial," went on Christina, "but we never guessed that we should find the third corner of the Triangle so soon. In some schools it's been almost a year before we discovered one."

"We put 'em in on trial at first, of course," warned Jane. "Are you for it?"

"I guess so," laughed Nancy. "It sounds as if it would be a lot of fun."

"It is, rather," declared Jane modestly. "We're nothing if not fun, we twins. I say, Christina, your hair looks quite respectable. Go and find the other waif-and-stray."

"That's another of our queer habits—to adopt

waifs-and-strays," explained Christina, sitting up to pat her "respectable" hair.

"Only when we like their looks," amended Jane hastily. "We liked Margaret's enough to consider her for a Triangler; but she isn't afraid of any of Christina's bugaboos, and she thinks clothes are a complete nuisance, just as I do. So she isn't eligible."

"But I'm certainly eligible for a homeless waif-and-stray," laughed Margaret. "Tell her about the other one, Jane."

"Sure," consented Jane. "Have you noticed a comical kid with wispy hair like mine and pipe-stem legs?"

"And the dearest baby face, only her expression is too sad and too experienced for such a little child," added Margaret.

"Yes, that's it exactly," agreed Christina admiringly. "Why, you talk just like a book, Margaret Lewis."

"I know which one you mean," declared Nancy. "She sat next to Miss Marshall at dinner last night, and I wanted to go right over and hug her, because she looked so little and scared."

"And yet so perfectly self-possessed," added Margaret. "If she'd cried a few tears she wouldn't have been half so pathetic."

"But if she had wept, she could never have been

the admired and envied protégée of the great and only twins," declared Jane pompously. "I hate cry-babies and so does Christina. It's pretty nearly the only thing we agree about."

Christina slipped off the bed and vanished in quest of the child with wispy hair, pipe-stem legs, and abnormal self-control. In a few minutes she was back, leading her small charge by the hand. The three girls on the bed said "Hello" cheerfully, and the child responded with a quaint little curtsey and a solemn "How do you do?"

"She says her name is Sarah Williston," explained Christina. "She's nine years old, and she thinks she would like boarding-school pretty well if she could have brought her kitten."

"I should just love to see my kitten," said the child, still very solemn. "Her name is Annette, and she has the softest gray fur."

"Sit down and drown your sorrows in candy," ordered Jane, passing the box.

"No, thank you," said the child, choosing a straight-backed chair and smoothing her skirts sedately over her slim legs.

"Don't you like candy, dear?" inquired Christina kindly.

"Yes, very much," said the child, "but I don't care for any to-day. I can't even eat candy while I'm missing Annette so much."

"Why did you name her Annette?" asked Nancy tactfully.

"After our cook. She said she would be proud to have such a sweet gray kitten named after her. I was going to name her after my—after some one else, but they said I was a silly child."

Nancy made a nest in the pillows beside her. "Come over here and tell us all about Annette, and why you love her so much. I've got a kitten at home, too."

The child sprang into Nancy's outstretched arms, and as she snuggled down among the pillows Nancy felt the small body tremble and saw the lips quiver and then stiffen into a brave pink line.

"Tell me about your kitten first," Sarah whispered.

By the time Nancy had explained that her kitten was called the Spoiled Kitten because its face was half black and half yellow, and it had mysteriously lost the end of its tail and the tip of one ear, Annette's mistress was quite composed again.

"But I guess I hadn't better talk about Annette any more just now," she said. "Could we talk about other things, please?"

"We're going to adopt you," Jane told her. "Are you willing?"

"I don't know what adopt is," confessed Sarah.

"Oh, it means that we'll look out for you and —tie your hair ribbons when they come off, and— let you go walking with us, almost always, and —talk to you about Annette or other things, and just generally jolly you up. And it's all to be a grand secret. Remember that! You mustn't tell that you've been adopted or it will all be spoiled. We'll un-adopt you, and then you'll wish you were a Franulated Mufflin."

"What's that?" asked the child in awe-struck tones.

"Something uncommonly uncouth and exceedingly unpleasant. We'll show you one some day."

"Well, I won't ever, ever tell," the child promised eagerly, "except,—I could just whisper it to Annette, couldn't I, when I go home again?"

"Of course, you cute child." Christina hugged her. "Do you like pictures? I can draw a lovely cat. It's very easy. I'll show you how."

The two sat on the floor, absorbed in making a cat out of a circle for its body, a half-circle for its head, two little wiggles for ears, and a long wavy wiggle for a tail.

"Poor little mite!" murmured Margaret.

"Her mother can't love her much, seems to me —sending her off to school when she's nothing but a baby," added Nancy softly.

She had not realized what long ears little pitchers have.

"My mother does love me much," piped a small voice from the floor. "She's a beautiful mother. But she's got nerves. If your mother has got nerves, you have to be sent off to boarding-school. I shouldn't mind a bit if I could only bring Annette."

She sighed as she looked at the cat that Christina had drawn for her. "That's a very nice picture, but Annette is so soft and purry-furry and sweet. I guess I'll go and write cook to be sure not to forget to feed her. I've had a beautiful time in here, and I won't tell the secret to anybody. Good-bye." And with her quaint little curtsey she departed.

"Isn't she a dear?" said Margaret.

"Can't we adopt her too?" asked Nancy.

"Rather not," Jane told her severely. "You may be in the Triangle if you turn out well, but you're not twins. And," pointing to Margaret, "she's only a waif-and-stray herself."

"We thought of it first, you see," explained Christina politely. "But you can be nice to her just the same. She likes Miss Lee best anyway, because of the Spoiled Kitten."

That evening, while Nancy and Grace were studying, a wad of paper hurtled in at the open door

and hit the unoffending Grace in the eye. When smoothed out, the paper proved to be covered on one side with triangles of all possible shapes and sizes. On the other was a cryptic communication to this effect:

"DEAR △ER—

"Owing to unusually low spirits, due to continued rain, ∠ and ∖ need /\. There will ∴ be a △ meet in the Twins' parlor at 8:45. High jinks.

∠ ∖"

"Oh, it's for me, from those comical twins," cried Nancy, when Grace had passed it to her with a cutting remark about "childish nonsense." "I told you about being in their room this afternoon. They're lots of fun. You'd better come along and see the 'high jinks.'"

"Thank you, but I'm not in the habit of going where I'm not invited," Grace told her stiffly, and refused to change her mind even when Christina, at Nancy's request, crossed the hall on purpose to ask her.

The rest of the third corridor girls were not so ceremonious; they found the strange noises issuing from the twins' rooms altogether irresistible, swarmed in to satisfy their curiosity, and stayed because tall, lank Jane in the costume of an Infant Terrible—starched white skirts up to her knees, a

huge blue sash, black mitts, and a droopy picture-hat with a draggled pink feather—was simply too funny to miss, as, in a piping, nasal treble she delivered a monologue describing how she had "returned an egg that mommer borrowed off Mis' Smith, played the pianner for popper's partner, and entertained sister Maria's best beau."

"Oh, that's nothing," she declared, when the audience applauded noisily and called for more. "I can do other infant ones, and a deaf lady at a wedding, and Aunt Jerusha come to town to shop, —oh, and a Franulated Mufflin. That's my prize package, isn't it, Christina darling? But I never do more than one at a time. That's a Rule. You may think you'd never get tired of hearing me, but you would. So just wait patiently till I feel like relieving my mind again. And you'd all better scud now, before Miss Marshall sends up to inquire about this unseemly racket. Oh, we haven't been to four boarding-schools without learning a few little things about cause and effect, have we, Christina?"

Nancy danced across the hall, and while she undressed called out to Grace, in the other bedroom, a full account of the "high jinks" she had missed.

"They're awfully comical and jolly," she ended. "I'm glad they room right across from us."

"The one that came over here seemed very nice," Grace agreed. "And I"—she hesitated—"I sort of wished afterward that I'd gone back with her."

Nancy smiled wickedly to herself and reflected: "She's finding that prickles don't pay." Aloud she said heartily, "Too bad you didn't."

CHAPTER III

"VERA LAWSON SAYS"

"VERA LAWSON says that new girls are not supposed to call on each other or have 'shows' and parties until after the old girls have called on us." Grace Allen repeated this decision to Nancy the evening after the twins' entertainment, with an "I told you so" air and an assumption of finality that Nancy found very irritating.

"Who is Vera Lawson?" she demanded.

"That pretty senior who sits at the head of their class table in the dining-room. You must have noticed her; she is tall and willowy, and has the biggest blue eyes and the loveliest peach-blossom complexion."

Nancy nodded. "I remember. She is pretty, but I don't see why she should make rules for the school."

"She doesn't make the rules; she only explained the custom. It seems that the old girls always come around to call on the first Saturday afternoon. Then on Saturday evening there is a dance in the gym., and the old girls introduce the new ones to one another."

"Saturday—that's to-morrow," reflected Nancy aloud. "Was it the twins' 'high jinks' that Miss Lawson objected to?"

"I suppose so," Grace admitted. "I didn't hear her say it. Miss Westervelt told me."

Nancy chuckled. "I can't settle down to studying until I'm sure that the twins have heard the awful news. I'll be back in a second."

"Isn't it against——" began Grace, but Nancy had shut the door behind her.

In the hall Nancy found herself suddenly face to face with Miss Marshall.

"Oh, dear!" Nancy's voice was full of a genuine remorse. "It's against the rules to leave your room in study-hour, isn't it, Miss Marshall? I knew that as well as anything, but I forgot."

Miss Marshall smiled. People generally smiled at Nancy Lee when she was feeling very serious. "Do you think that's a good excuse?"

Nancy considered. "Well, for the second evening of rules, Miss Marshall, I think it might be. But not afterward. I ought to remember the rules when I'm a little more used to them. There aren't very many."

"That sounds reasonable," agreed Miss Marshall. "I'm glad you don't intend to be an 'I-forgot' girl. We don't want her at Fair Oaks. She's a very unpleasant and even dangerous person."

"Oh, Miss Marshall!" Nancy's gray eyes were round with amazement. "However did you guess that I'm one—a regular 'I-forgot' girl?" Nancy laughed a little gurgling laugh at the fitness of the title. "I'm always and forever doing foolish things because I didn't think first." She paused suddenly and blushed with annoyance to think how accurately she had just illustrated her own characterization; without thinking she had made a confession to Miss Marshall that would undoubtedly lead to a long and tiresome lecture on the subject of thoughtlessness.

But Miss Marshall did not lecture her; she only smiled again and said, "It's much nicer in the long run to think first than second, so do try to get the habit. Now run along and finish the important business that made you forget study-hour."

"But oughtn't I to go back to my own room," began Nancy doubtfully, "now that I've remembered the rule?"

"Theoretically, yes," laughed Miss Marshall, "but I'm letting you go on instead, because I have an idea that you'll study better with the important errand out of your mind. It needn't take but a minute. Good-night, Miss Lee."

Then impulsive Nancy did something, which, after she knew the dignified Miss Marshall better,

she never would have dreamed of daring. She reached out her hand and caught Miss Marshall's arm in a firm, detaining grasp. "Please call me Nancy," she begged. "I hate to be called Miss Lee. If you only will, why, I shall like school twice as well, and I'll try twice as hard to remember to do as you ask."

"That's a bargain, Nancy. Now run along."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Marshall," cried grateful Nancy, and "ran along" so fast that the twins thought a whirlwind was turning in, with a hasty apology for a knock, at their half-open door.

"Just came to say that you've been altogether too fresh," Nancy announced breathlessly, with dancing eyes. "It's not customary in this school to have shows and parties until you've been properly introduced."

"Who says that?" demanded Jane calmly.

"Vera Lawson, and she knows. I must go now. Miss Marshall told me to hurry and tell you and then get back to my work."

And having thus cruelly excited the curiosity of Jane and Christina, Nancy rushed back to her desk, seated herself with a bang that made Grace shiver ostentatiously, and plunged into her history lesson with a vim that Nancy Lee exercised impartially at work and play.

Unfortunately mental concentration was not

among the accomplishments that the twins had acquired in the course of their varied boarding-school experience. They stayed in their study perforce; Nancy's enigmatical mention of Miss Marshall had made Christina almost tearful and Jane very sober.

"It's beastly luck," grumbled Jane, "if we're in a silly old scrape so soon—when we haven't done a thing, either. Great hat, Christina! Whatever possessed you to want to come to Fair Oaks?"

Jane never said "Great hat" unless she was deeply agitated. Christina stared at her sadly. "We'd better stop talking and study," she advised. "Flunking to-morrow won't improve matters. What was that Nancy said about being properly introduced?"

"Don't know," muttered Jane, and buried herself in gloom and silence so impenetrable that Christina thought she was really studying until the gong rang for recreation and Jane jumped for the door with a promptness that betrayed the true direction of her thoughts. Christina rushed after her, and almost before the bell had ceased ringing the two confronted Nancy.

"Good-evening," said Christina politely to Grace Allen, who was staring in amazement at the onset. Jane waited for no such ceremonies. "What's the row?" she demanded briefly. "You're a nice Tri-

angler, you are, getting us into a blue funk and then running away. If you can't explain your conduct you'll wish you were a Franulated Mufflin before morning."

"Well, I can explain," laughed Nancy. "Sit down. Have you met my roommate, Grace Allen? Now you've been properly introduced to her, so you can stay for a call. Otherwise it would be our painful duty to send them home, wouldn't it, Grace?"

Grace flushed angrily. "I don't see anything to laugh at," she said. "I only told you what I heard."

"Oh, what was it, please?" begged Christina.

"Never felt less like laughing in my life, Miss Allen," Jane assured her solemnly.

"Well," began Grace stiffly, "of course it's of very little consequence anyway, only I had told my roommate that I thought the new girls ought to wait for the old girls to take the initiative about calls and so on, and now it seems that that is the custom." Grace explained the unwritten law. "Vera Lawson told some of the girls about it this evening after dinner. She said the old girls were quite indignant because this year the new ones seemed to be so much at home here already, and that the Saturday dance wouldn't have any point if people all knew one another beforehand."

The twins listened intently. When Grace had

finished they turned to Nancy and shot a question at her in unconscious unison.

"How does Miss Marshall come into that?"

"Oh, she explains my conduct." Nancy related the details of her encounter with Miss Marshall and repeated that lady's instructions to her to do her errand and hurry back. "So I couldn't wait till later," Nancy assured them solemnly, "and I couldn't stop to explain. And it's not my fault if you two didn't half listen to what I said and wasted your study-hour worrying. I'll lend you my alarm-clock for to-morrow morning."

Jane glared angrily, and then burst into a little shriek of laughter. "Isn't that one on us, Christina darling? Sitting around in a blue funk all the evening, just because a senior named Vera Lawson doesn't like our happy little ways. Come on and find Margaret Lewis and tell her the joke. You too, Miss Allen."

But Grace declined with studied politeness, and the other three annexed Margaret,—she had found temporary quarters in the room of a girl whose mother was ill and had sent for her—and descended noisily upon Kittie Westervelt, the authority for Vera Lawson's criticism of the new girls' conduct.

Kittie was sitting in solitary state in her study, which had been evolved, like Kittie's toilettes,

into a marvel of elaborate and rather "fussy" elegance.

"How do you do?" she greeted them constrainedly. "Come in. I'm glad to see you."

"No, you're not," Nancy told her firmly. "You're scared about having callers before Saturday."

"'Specially such callers as us terrible twins," added Jane.

"Let me introduce you to the Misses Learned and Miss Lewis," went on Nancy hastily. "If they're introduced, they may stay, mayn't they?"

"We'll go away just the minute you've told us what Miss Vera Lawson really said," explained Jane sweetly.

Kittie looked very solemn, and repeated Vera's admonitions carefully. "You see she spoke to me," Kittie went on importantly, "because I know her. At least my cousin Anne used to room with her, and so Anne wrote her to look me up. It's awfully nice for me, of course, because Vera Lawson is the most popular senior and just about runs this school."

"Why is she so popular, Kittie?" asked Nancy curiously.

"Why, because the girls like her," explained Kittie vaguely, "and because she's so awfully pretty. Then she's been here for ages—six years."

Jane sighed deeply. "Think of that, Christina darling! Six years in one little old school. I'm beginning to be sorry for Miss Vera Lawson, if you ask me."

"I'll tell you something else about her,"—Kittie's manner grew confidential and very impressive. "Anne told me, but I guess it's no great secret. She's engaged—to a man her parents don't approve of. But Vera says she'll never, never give him up; and she's back at school this year because she hasn't the heart to 'come out' in society, and appear gay and light-hearted when she's really feeling so perfectly miserable. It's all awfully romantic, I think."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Christina eagerly.

"I'm not much for romance, myself," said Jane, stifling a yawn. "Now to return to the point at issue. Can anybody here present see any particular sense in sitting around all this first week, getting bluer and homesicker every minute, just because it's the custom?"

"Vera says the new girls have always seemed to like to be quiet and retiring at first," said Kittie solemnly. "Of course, under the circumstances, I can't but try to please Vera."

"All right. We were just going anyway," laughed Nancy, jumping up. "Good-night."

"Tell her to speak about the rest of her old un-

written rules before we've had a chance to break 'em to splinters," advised Jane.

Kittie looked wistfully after them as they disappeared, chatting merrily, down the corridor. Her sociable little soul was torn with conflict between her wish to call them back or to join them, and her sense of loyalty to Vera Lawson. But she remembered the pathetic romance, and Vera triumphed, as usual. One of last year's senior class had been heard to say that Vera Lawson was too clever not to be a " blighted being " ; it was such a nice easy way of making people fetch and carry for her.

" Vera's pretty, and Vera's rather good fun," she declared, " but her trump card is that everlasting old engagement. Of course, she'll never give him up! Not while she enjoys having all the new girls crazy about her, and her room full of violets and smuggled chocolates."

Fortunately for Vera Lawson there were few such critics among the Fair Oaks girls. If it was true that Vera traded upon the sympathy of her adorers, they nevertheless continued unsuspiciously to adore. Vera was so pretty! She had such a sweet way of thanking you for your small attentions. If she did find a good deal of fault, why, that was only because she knew so well how things ought to be done. Her manners were per-

fect, and her dresses were made by a French madame. So naturally, "Vera Lawson says" went a long way at Fair Oaks. If Vera had realized how eagerly her chance words were caught up and quoted and fashioned into cast-iron decrees, perhaps she would have been a little more careful. If she had had a sense of humor, she would certainly have been more tolerant. But Vera lived in the narrow little world of self; she took her own affairs very seriously; and she was perfectly satisfied with herself, her standards of life, and the position she held at Fair Oaks as social arbiter and school idol. When she heard how Jane Learned had defied her authority and scoffed at a school tradition, she shrugged her fine shoulders and said: "Miss Learned evidently doesn't understand the customs of formal society. This is probably the first time she's ever been among strangers."

When this was repeated to Jane, of the extensive boarding-school experience, she laughed wickedly and composed a new monologue entitled, "Formal Society at Fair Oaks," in which Miss Vera Lawson figured conspicuously. Jane delivered this monologue to an appreciative audience after Saturday luncheon, with the result that Miss Lawson's first calls upon the new girls were received less breathlessly, and resulted in fewer "crushes," than ever before in Vera's long reign at Fair Oaks.

She did not call upon the twins; just as she reached their door in her round, the dressing-gong rang and she departed, after a curt little apology which was received by Jane with a knowing smile and by Christina with deep blushes and a fervent invitation to "Please come some other day." Whatever Jane might think, Christina was profoundly interested in pretty girls with unhappy love affairs. And when Vera smiled at her out of her wonderful blue eyes, and promised to come, Christina told Jane that if she ever dared to do that horrid monologue again —

"Oh, I shan't," Jane assured her complacently. "I shall think of funnier ones before I've been here much longer."

The dance, in spite of Vera's gloomy prognostications, was the most successful "first Saturday" ever held at Fair Oaks. Miss Marshall said so herself. She stayed in the gymnasium gallery, helping to amuse a few girls who did not dance. But Miss Margery Dutton, looking younger than ever in pink chiffon, was down with the dancers. She had been to college and could "lead." The new girls clustered around her, begging for dances.

"You must have the first with me," Kittie Westervelt declared, blushing, "because—you know why."

And Miss Dutton agreed laughingly. "You mean because you befriended me on my first evening."

"What a sweet way of expressing it!" cried Kittie fervently. "And how splendidly you lead —just like a man!"

"You'll soon learn," Miss Dutton assured her. "It's very easy. All the old girls know how."

"All but Vera Lawson," amended Kittie. "She thinks it spoils your dancing. What should you say about that, Miss Dutton?"

Miss Dutton laughed. "I suppose it may. But think of the fun you will miss all through school and college, if you always have to wait for a girl who can lead you."

Kittie sighed. Vera Lawson had said, "Of course you won't be silly and learn to lead. The men hate it." And Kittie had agreed eagerly, "Of course not." And now Nancy Lee and Margaret Lewis and Christina Learned and Plain Mary Smith were having a splendid time leading each other. Plain Mary Smith could reverse already, and the old girls were loud in their congratulations. Only Grace and Kittie refused to try. Kittie had plenty of partners, but dancing in the usual way was tame compared with the excitement of trying to lead. Kittie almost wished that her cousin Anne had not roomed with the wonder-

ful Vera Lawson. It committed poor Kittie so unquestioningly to all the Lawson decrees. Vera was wearing Margaret's roses. Nancy Lee had run all the way over to the senior cottage to find her a forgotten fan. And yet neither of them was denied the fun of trying to lead. But in the end it would pay; Kittie felt sure of that. Vera had promised to try to help her get rid of Lloyd Mallory, who, alone as usual, was dangling her ungainly elbows over the balcony railing, watching the dance with eager, absorbed eyes. Kittie was more and more disappointed in her queer roommate.

"She goes walking on the campus—alone—at evening recreation," she confided to Nancy later. "I told her it must be against the rules, and not proper anyway, but she said she didn't think so, and anyway she was about ready to explode with sitting still in the house so much. I shall tell Miss Marshall that I can't room with such a barbarian."

Nancy had discovered something. "Do you know which is Helena Curtis?" she asked. "She's the one with a squint and glasses,—the one who's so dreadfully near-sighted that she bunts into people in the halls. She was changed to a single because she can't even see to study, and has to have a tutor come and read all the lessons aloud

to her, poor thing! And you knew she was 'just your kind,'" quoted Nancy mockingly.

"Well," Kittie parried, "I may have been a little mistaken about Helena Curtis, but a person can't help being near-sighted, and I almost think I should have preferred her to Lloyd."

"And maybe Lloyd would have preferred rooming alone to rooming with you, Kittie," suggested Nancy soberly. "If she seems queer and different, why, she probably finds you the same, and perhaps she's just as miserable about it as you are."

"But she doesn't have to be ashamed of me," objected Kittie. "Her clothes spoil the whole effect of my study, and she doesn't fit in to anything. To-night, for instance, she can't dance."

"Teach her," suggested Nancy promptly. "I'll help. I like her just because she is different."

"Then you may teach her to dance," sniffed Kittie. "I dislike her, and I hope I can arrange——" Kittie paused, remembering that Vera had told her not to mention their plan for getting rid of Lloyd. "Have you a crush on Vera Lawson?" Kittie demanded, to change the subject.

"No, I haven't—I think crushes are awfully silly. She asked me to get her fan for her to-night, so of course I did; and now you are the sixth person who has asked me if I had a crush on her."

That night Nancy wrote in her journal:

"I have learned a lot this week—how to lead in a two-step, and pretty nearly in a waltz, besides the regular school lessons. And I have about decided to start a boarding-school of my own, when I'm older, where you don't have roommates, and where crushes are against the rules. Those are the two worst things here. Jane says to 'wait and see if there is a tabby teacher,'—she means the sneaking around, fussy kind—but you can keep out of the way of a 'tabby teacher,' and you get mixed up with the other two things in spite of yourself. I'm thankful to say my roommate isn't the crush kind. It would be awful to have both the horrors mixed together in one girl. But leading and the twins are lots of fun, so I hope every week goes zipping along like this one. (Zipping is slang, I guess, but I don't believe there is any other way to say it.)"

CHAPTER IV

PLANNING GHOSTS AND WITCHES

"Vera Lawson says to vote for a Hallowe'en party, because Miss Marshall nearly always gives us a regular dance anyway."

Miss Marshall had called a meeting of the school to vote on their choice for the big fall-term entertainment, and Vera Lawson's roommate, Ernestine Bray, commonly known as Billy Bray, sauntered down the middle aisle of Assembly to her seat with the seniors, delivering Vera's message casually as she went. It was generally received merely with smiles and nods, but Jane Learned sent an answer.

"Tell her I shall," she informed Ernestine calmly, "because Hallowe'en is so near and ghost parties are so ripping, and for no other reason in the world."

And between Jane's excellent argument and Vera's strong following a Hallowe'en party was unanimously decided upon. And it was Jane who planned most of it, though she wasn't even on the committee that Miss Marshall, who believed in

cultivating executive ability by practice, exactly as you cultivate a French accent, asked to "assist the faculty hostesses with the preliminary arrangements." Nancy Lee was on the committee; Miss Marshall had remembered the self-confessed "I-forgot girl" and been curious to see more of her; and it was through Nancy that Jane's ideas percolated into the committee's laborious sessions, where they were joyously seized upon as "the very best ever."

"Oh, not so bad as that," Jane declared modestly to Nancy, who repeated the committee's comment. "Just you wait and see what I can do when my brain gets limbered up a little in the direction of legitimate entertainments. At Hartover Hall, where we camped down last year, the only diversion was midnight spreads, and maybe I'm not an expert on smell-less cookery, and raiding the pantry, and conveying sugar bowls and plates of butter from the dining-room to a higher sphere. Remember the time we spilt the chocolate on Hester Low's closet floor and it dripped down the cracks into the Head's room? That was the limit of a mess, n'est ce pas, Christina darling?"

"Hester Low was last year's Triangler," explained Christina, "and she was always in a mess, so we were too. I'm rather glad you're not that kind."

"But I am." Nancy made a wry face. "I don't ever mean to be ——"

"All the difference," put in Jane. "Hester never meant anything else."

"But I'm in before I think, all the same," Nancy concluded. "You'll see how it is before you've known me long."

"Maybe we'll put you out of the Triangle," Jane threatened darkly.

"Jane Learned, you know better than that," little Christina reproved her tall twin. "You know it's much more likely that we shall be the ones to drag her into a mess."

"Don't bother me, Christina," Jane returned affably. "I'm trying to think of a dinky little Hallowe'en stunt for our smallest waif-and-stray. She can't plan her own costume."

"Something about a kitten," suggested Nancy, "because that's all in the world she cares about."

Jane stared at her dreamily out of half-shut eyes. "Kitten—Hallowe'en. Hallowe'en—witch. Witch—broomstick—no, witch—cat. All right, I have it, Nancy Lee. When I have perfected it, I'll explain. Meanwhile there is the dressing-bell, and to hair like mine its summons is imperative. Go and return no more until the hour of evening gambols." Jane pointed a tragic finger at the door, and Nancy departed wondering whether the

"dinky little stunt" was for Sarah to impersonate a witch, or a cat, or both.

"I wish I had a head full of queer ideas like Jane's," Nancy reflected, as she dressed. "I might say over 'Kitten—Hallowe'en—Hallowe'en—Kitten' for hours, and it wouldn't start anything. But Jane says it once, and it turns into a witch for her. Gracious me! I can't go and discuss Hallowe'en things with Jane at recreation. I promised to begin teaching Lloyd Mallory to dance."

But when the recreation bell rang, Jane flew in, demanding that Nancy should come at once and help her hunt for Margaret Lewis, so the three could talk over the new "stunt" for Sarah, which was to be the crowning feature of the Hallowe'en party. And Nancy forgot Lloyd again and went.

"Sarah Williston ought to be a witch, you know," Jane explained to Margaret, "so she can have a cat to trot around with, poor homesick infant. Now you're literary. Can't you remember a nice witch in a book that could be adapted for Sarah?"

Margaret considered. "I'm not so specially literary, Jane."

"Then you shouldn't talk like a book and make people think you are," interposed Jane hastily. "Hurry up now and think of a witch."

"CAN'T YOU REMEMBER A NICE WITCH?"

"The only ones I can think of this minute are the three in 'Macbeth,' that made a charm in a cauldron and told Macbeth's fortune."

Jane frowned. "Sarah can't be three witches. The idea of saying you're not literary, Margaret, when you can reel off words like cauldron. What is a cauldron, anyway?"

"Why, a kind of kettle, isn't it?" explained Margaret doubtfully. "They cooked the charm in it over a fire, I think, and—I don't know what it had to do with the fortune."

"It would be terribly cute for young Sarah to cook a charm in a kettle. Why couldn't she fish out the fortunes the way sleight-of-hand men fish live rabbits out of dishes and hats and other such places?"

"But probably young Sarah can't do magic tricks," objected Nancy.

"Oh, it can be arranged somehow, I'm sure," Jane told them easily. "She can wear a pointed black hat and a black cloak, and lean on a cane. Her hair is witchy-wild to start with, and it will look great powdered. And we will borrow a huge black cat to sit on her shoulder and yowl like sixty, while she cooks the charm."

"As if strange cats would sit still on a person's shoulder," sniffed Nancy.

"And yowl to order," added Margaret.

"Oh, it can be arranged somehow, I'm sure," Jane repeated. "The only job that really worries me is thinking up a dinky little stunt for myself. Ghosts and witches and jack-o'-lanterns—what else goes with Hallowe'en, girls? I want something highly original and absolutely unique."

"Why don't you be the witch's cat?" asked Margaret.

"And then I'll be the cat's yowl," laughed Nancy. "That will be—oh, dear, I promised to begin teaching Lloyd Mallory to dance to-night! I must go this minute."

"No, you don't," commanded Jane sternly. "You've got to help us plan how I can be the witch's cat. Miss Mallory won't care, and besides it's too late now to begin on anything important like a dancing lesson."

"All the Hallowe'en committee are supposed to be on the lookout for ideas," put in Margaret craftily. "So you oughtn't to neglect this fine opportunity. It's your duty to the school to stay here. You can teach Miss Mallory to dance some night when there's nothing else to do."

"But she'll be waiting for me," objected Nancy.

"Not all this time," Jane assured her. "Sit down, child. You have an exaggerated idea of your own importance. Now how would everybody suggest making me into a black cat?"

"Oh, I know," cried Nancy eagerly. "You can get a mask that looks like a cat's head, and then you can do yourself all up in a black shawl or something like that and crawl around after Sarah. Of course you're much too big to sit on her shoulder."

It was very exciting planning a cat, and even more so planning the yowl. When Nancy finally decided to go and find Lloyd, it was exactly three minutes before the nine o'clock gong would ring.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she began, bursting into Lloyd's and Kittie's study. "Kittie! Lloyd! Are you there?"

"I am," answered Lloyd, coming out of her bedroom. "Kittie is off somewhere with her friends."

"And you stayed here all this time and waited for me," began Nancy repentantly. "I'm awfully sorry. First I forgot, and then when I remembered the girls said it was too late and that you would have given me up. I'm truly just as sorry as I can be."

"Oh, it doesn't matter at all," said Lloyd quietly. "I knew you'd forgotten or—or—something like that. It doesn't matter, really. I stayed here because I hadn't anything else to do. I don't believe I can learn to dance anyway."

"Why, of course you can," Nancy told her earnestly. "Anybody can—it's just as easy." She hummed a waltz tune and whirled gracefully across the room.

"But I'm so tall and awkward," objected Lloyd, watching her admiringly. "I never realized till I came here what a queer person I am—how different from most girls, I mean."

"You are different," Nancy agreed laughingly. "That's why I like you, and why I am bound you shall let me show you how to dance, even if I was horrid to-night and forgot. I truly won't forget to-morrow."

"It won't matter a bit if you do," Lloyd assured her earnestly, "because now I know you don't mean to. And—it's just awfully nice of you to bother, Nancy."

Before Nancy could answer her, Kittie appeared. She was in high spirits, and, quite ignoring Lloyd, pulled Nancy into her bedroom, whence whispers and giggles proclaimed unmistakably that a grand secret was being told. And before Kittie had finished her amusing confidences, the nine o'clock gong rang and Nancy had to go. But first she ran over to Lloyd's door.

"It was about Hallowe'en, Lloyd," she explained hastily. "The committee has to be in all the secrets, you know, so they can plan the order

they're to come in. You'll excuse us, won't you? And don't forget to-morrow."

Lloyd nodded stolidly, but as soon as Nancy had turned away her soft brown eyes were swimming with tears. Nancy would forget again, of course, —Nancy, who was in all the Hallowe'en secrets. Lloyd wasn't homesick like Plain Mary Smith. She was lonely—out of the fun that seemed to her unaccustomed eyes so exciting—out of the friendly fellowship that she longed for with all the fierce passion of her starved little soul. The Mallory ranches were the finest in the state of Washington —the biggest and the loneliest. All her life Lloyd had lived on the great home-ranch, with her stern, absent-minded father, who scarcely knew that he had a daughter, and her querulous, invalid mother, who, remembering vaguely the ways of her own pampered girlhood, alternately scolded and spoiled the tall, silent creature, whose tastes and habits and ideas she found wholly unaccountable. So Lloyd roamed the buttes on her pony, who was her best friend. The others were Pete, the ranch foreman, and his cattle-herders. They taught her to ride straight and shoot straight, to fear nothing but a cattle stampede and a forest fire, to love the freedom of the open spaces, and to keep her loves and her hates and her fears to herself,—in comparison with which the things that a succession of

rather frightened governesses from Chicago taught her counted for very little indeed. And then, on her sixteenth birthday, Lloyd went to Seattle with her father, who had business there, lunched with the daughters of his lawyer, came back to the ranch, rode her pony Ginger to a lather the next morning, and in the afternoon announced that she was going East to boarding-school—the one the Nash girls had been to. Two days later she started, with a frightened governess as escort; and not even when Kittie Westervelt had been most sarcastic and the riddle of making herself a part of this strange little universe of boarding-school had seemed most unsolvable, not even when tallness, awkwardness, and social unaccustomedness had loomed up as the very blackest of crimes, had Lloyd Mallory regretted her sudden flitting to Fair Oaks School for Girls.

Of course the chief trouble was that Lloyd, having been made to feel, in the first five minutes of her intercourse with Kittie, that she was a hopeless barbarian and an interloper, had foolishly decided to keep herself more than ever to herself. If she had capped Kittie's reminiscences of fine clothes, flirtations, and belledom at dances, with accounts of round-ups, coyote hunts, and wild rides after stolen cattle, Kittie would speedily have made a heroine out of her queer roommate. But Lloyd

never dreamed that, if Kittie knew more about ranch-life, she would find it interesting. She decided to suppress her past, and somehow she could not manage to begin over again. She could not even spend money; there had been nothing to spend money for at the ranch. She looked helplessly at the big roll of bills that her father had given her, never guessing, either, how a sight of that roll or the practical application of it to her wardrobe would have affected Kittie's judgment of her. And to Lloyd, Kittie stood for Fair Oaks. If you couldn't make your roommate like you, she reasoned, who would? Nancy Lee could have explained the fallacy behind that logic, but of course she never thought to, any more than she thought to tell the twins and Margaret that she liked Lloyd. Whereas Kittie never lost a chance of explaining how Lloyd didn't knock on the study door, didn't know how to dance or play the piano, had never been to New York, said, "It looks like it would rain," had no evening dress, and was "just as green as could be about everything under the sun." And when Vera Lawson took up Kittie's cause and threw herself eagerly into the task of making Lloyd seem so impossible that Miss Marshall would change her mind and let Kittie change roommates, it looked as if Lloyd Mallory would remain as she had begun, an outsider at Fair Oaks, with no share

in the fun of being a girl among girl friends—a blissful state, the picture of which, as painted by the Seattle girls, had brought impulsive Lloyd across the continent in hot haste to see for herself what life was like away from Ginger and Pete and the wide, free spaces of Mallory's home-ranch.

CHAPTER V

THAT HALLOWE'EN PARTY

Nancy didn't forget Lloyd again. She conscientiously devoted two whole evening recreations to her tall pupil, who disproved her own gloomy forebodings by "catching on" to the waltz with astonishing rapidity.

"The rhythm is just like riding," explained Lloyd. "You go with the music just as you move with your horse. That's why I can do it."

"Oh, can you ride horseback?" asked Nancy eagerly. "But of course you can—Kittie said you live on a ranch. I'm wild to learn. Miss Marshall is trying to arrange for a riding class, and I've written home to see if I may have lessons."

"Let me teach you," begged Lloyd. "You've taught me to dance."

Nancy laughed. "I shouldn't dare to try unless I had a real riding-master to catch me if I fell off. Thank you just the same, Lloyd. After I get to be a fine rider perhaps we can go off together."

Lloyd nodded, a mist in her eyes as she thought

of Ginger,—poor lonely Ginger, eating his head off in the corral at home.

"I'll write Pete to send him up the canyon with the three-year-olds," she decided. "Then he'll be wild as the wind by spring, and I'll have a time breaking him in again. I wonder if their 'real riding-master' could stick on a bucker."

But for the moment even riding lessons were of small importance; the Hallowe'en party was the only thing thought of or talked about at Fair Oaks. It was to begin with a progressive supper. As slangy Jane Learned put it, "When it's up to you to seek your downy at nine-thirty sharp, any big doings that are on for the evening had better take an early start."

The first course of the supper was to be served in the big dormitory dining-room, the next at the Junior House, the third at the Senior Cottage, and dessert in the gymnasium, where, afterward, the Hallowe'en "stunts" were to be performed, with a short dance in costume as a grand finale. The dormitory course was in charge of the second-year inmates, while the new girls were responsible for the gymnasium spread, and the seniors and juniors, of course, for the parts served in their respective cottages. Miss Marshall and the committee had arranged the menu, but there was room for much ingenuity and keen rivalry in the matter

of table decorations, favors, and any jokes or "grinds" that could be devised to make more fun for the maskers.

Fully three days beforehand everything was planned and as far as possible made ready. And how those days did drag, till it seemed as if the end of October would never, never come. But come it did at last, and somehow lessons were gone through with, and a shortened afternoon study-hour, and then it was time to decorate the rooms for the festivities, and after that to dress—in frantic haste lest you should be late for the party, bothering your roommate to distraction, meanwhile, with demands to be pinned into your costume, and inquiries if you looked all right and if anybody could possibly guess who you were.

The tall girls were ghosts, in sheets and pillow-cases and little white dominos; the short ones were jack-o'-lanterns, with yellow gowns, black dominos, and long wands that had saucy little pasteboard jack-o'-lanterns hung from the ends of them. Sarah Williston and the two smallest day-pupils were witches, in black dresses and pointed hats. Jane Learned "made up" their wrinkled old faces, powdered their hair, showed them how to lean hard on their canes and how to talk like toothless old crones, and hinted with delightful

mystery at a grand surprise that the evening had in store for them.

And presently tall ghosts, roly-poly jack-o'-lanterns, and little wrinkled witches were all down in the big dining-room, which was gay with autumn branches. Bunches of bright leaves formed the centerpieces for the tables, and at each place a card with a tiny red leaf pasted in the corner indicated the seating arrangement—not by names, of course, but by absurd directions, such as: "This seat reserved for a jack-o'-lantern that lisps"; "A very fat ghost shall occupy this place"; "For the witheredest, witchiest witch"; and so on. Candles in red shades shed a soft light over the gay scene, and ghosts, jack-o'-lanterns, and witches "Oh-ed," "Ah-ed," and congratulated the second-floor girls, when they could pick one out of the masked throng, in most enthusiastic fashion.

"It's so pretty that I can't stop staring long enough to find a place that fits me," declared an extra-small jack-o'-lantern in anxious tones that belonged unmistakably to Kittie Westervelt.

"Kittie's evidently not so hungry as yours truly," said an extra-tall ghost reproachfully. "Have pity on a starving female, and let's get right to business."

"That's the diction of Jane Learned," squeaked

her next door neighbor, in a voice that she flattered herself was completely disguised.

But, "That's the high-flown literary lingo of Maggie Lewis," returned Jane promptly.

The girl on Jane's other side was a complete enigma. She spoke only in droning monosyllables, wore her pillow-case hood far down over her forehead, and in spite of Jane's ingenious attempts to catch her off her guard, never let a characteristic phrase or gesture escape her.

"Half the fun is in being found out," Jane told her severely at last.

But the enigma only shrugged and drawled, "Not by you," with an effect so crushing that even irrepressible Jane fell silent and was rather glad when the first course was over.

"Who in the world was that snippy ghost next to me?" she inquired of Margaret, as the two walked together to the Junior House.

"I'm not sure," Margaret told her, "but I think it was Lloyd Mallory. She's always queer and offish, and she seems to prefer going around alone. Whoever she was, I noticed that she didn't speak once at the table, except to answer you."

"And those were barks rather than speeches," Jane qualified severely. "Well, I hope she enjoys her silent, haughty evening, and I also hope that she doesn't choose to sit by me next time."

"Let's choose her," suggested Margaret. "Let's tag along after her and find out who she is. When a person is so awfully mysterious, it makes me ache to get the better of her."

"All right; I'm for it," agreed Jane. But when they reached the Junior House the mysterious ghost had vanished in the throng of sheeted figures, and neither Jane nor Margaret could find her again, either there or at the senior spread.

The juniors served their guests at little tables scattered through the first-floor rooms. The only light came from big jack-o'-lanterns, made from real pumpkins, which grinned uncannily out from dusky nooks and corners. Rows of tall, thin cucumber lanterns occupied the window sills. Small black lanterns, each holding a tiny taper, twinkled on the tables as favors.

"Not so pretty as the first course, but funnier," was the general verdict.

Suddenly a black-robed, silent ghost appeared, and touching a ghost here and a jack-o'-lantern there, bid them follow her to their seats. The black-robed ghost evidently believed that a domino party should keep as much as possible of its atmosphere of mystery. She adroitly separated girls who had already guessed each other's identity; she parried all attempts to find out who she was by a ghastly, ghostly groan; finally she stalked

majestically from table to table, displaying a sign, which explained that prizes would be awarded to those whose table-mates could not find out their names. As a result intelligible conversation was immediately replaced by moans, gibberings, unearthly shrieks, and strange, muffled noises, interspersed by an occasional dejected, "Oh, dear! I don't see how you ever guessed," or an excited "I've found you out, hurray!" At the end of the ordeal, six girls, out of the hundred odd assembled, proudly went forward to claim their prizes, which proved to be baskets of big, shiny red apples.

"You may pass them around later," mumbled the black-robed ghost.

"Thank you, Miss Walton," began one of the prize-winners glibly, sure that the black ghost was the junior house-mistress, the most dignified and unapproachable member of Fair Oaks faculty. Whereupon the black ghost tittered merrily, for she was only the house president, and Miss Walton had told her that very morning that her manner was "undignified and hoydenish."

Jane and Margaret scanned the prize-winners carefully, trying to recognize their mystery among them.

"Can't be sure," Jane murmured in Margaret's ear. "Did you spot her?"

Margaret shook her head. "Either of the two taller ghosts might have been she, but I couldn't be positive."

"Well, it's a safe guess that she took a prize," declared Jane solemnly. "She'd practiced up hard enough on me, and she certainly has a natural talent for keeping a secret, whoever she is. I suppose it was that Lloyd Mallory, all right. I can't think of any one else that would spurn my delicate attentions so coldly. There aren't many proud and haughty girls in this little old school."

The senior party started gaily off with a laugh. Two broomstick dolls stood just inside the door of the house, wearing simpering smiles of welcome on their cambric faces. Another pair, further down the hall, scowled fiercely and pointed to signs reading: "Ghosts and witches to right"; "Lanterns to left." The right-hand sign led to a brightly lighted room, gay with flowers in pumpkin vases; while the little lanterns found themselves in a cavernous apartment with grotesque black cats and solemn black owls guarding its mysteries. On each plate of salad sat a funny little gnome, and strains of unearthly music by a "spirit orchestra" floated out from behind a locked door under the stairs.

"Why didn't we think of ghost music?" wailed the other classes enviously.

And then it was, "Hurray for the gym. and the stunts!"

"I'm not hungry any longer, even for ice-cream."

"Hold up your trailing robes, dearie. That near-sighted Helena Curtis will break her neck over you yet."

"Plain Mary Smith hasn't guessed me. She certainly wasn't made to shine in guessing contests."

"When are we going to unmask? These dominos are the hottest things!"

"What's that kettle for over the fire? Oh, is it a witch's cauldron? I'm glad to have that much settled."

"The tub in the corner excites me. The wiggly things in the bottom are perfectly fascinating."

"I shall stay by the rope. Those dangling bundles all done up in oiled paper look most awfully interesting."

"I want to try everything: the Tub and the Rope and the Mystic Maze and the Whispering Bush. So please stop talking and eat faster or we shall simply never get started on the real fun."

Thus the Fair Oaks Hallowe'en party chattered its riotous way into the gymnasium, and rushed about there on a noisy tour of inspection, after which it settled down to the hasty but appreciative

consumption of ices shaped and colored like pumpkins, unmasked at a signal from Miss Marshall, who was watching the fun from the balcony, and then attacked the real business of the evening with an enthusiasm very flattering to the efforts of the committee on arrangements.

Nancy Lee, being on the committee aforesaid, knew all the secrets connected with the Tub of Fortune, the Writhing Rope, the Mystic Maze, and the Whispering Bush; and until it was time to dress up as the Witches' Cat's Yowl, which wouldn't be until just before the dancing, she had nothing in particular to do. So she hunted up the three little witches and led them to the Writhing Rope, which the committee had planned particularly for the amusement of the younger girls. The little bundles that dangled by long strings from the rope had been unwrapped, and they proved to be crusty rolls spread thick with jam. The game was to eat your roll the fastest.

"Come right up," urged the brisk little jack-o'-lantern who was in charge of the Writhing Rope. "Winner of contest is guaranteed to be married at eighteen, to a millionaire. The jam used on these rolls is the best imported variety. Come right up!"

There were just three vacant places on the rope, and Nancy hastily preëmpted them for the three

little witches. Turning away, she bumped into Kittie Westervelt.

"How you do fuss over that Williston child!" said Kittie rather crossly.

"Do I?" laughed Nancy. "Well, you see I'm the youngest at home, so I'm not used to children, but I always did love to play dolls, and I'm very fond of pets. Little Sarah is like a doll and a pet and a friend all mixed up together, so I like her, and just because I have a kitten at home she likes me. That's why I try to look after her a little."

"You'll get awfully sick of having her forever tagging along," Kittie prophesied gloomily. "I've got little sisters, and I know. Let's go and try the Mystic Maze."

"Don't you want a fortune out of the Tub first?" asked Nancy craftily, noticing that the Tub of Fortune was not drawing its share of the crowd. "They're awfully clever, and it takes a minute only to grab one out."

"Of course I want one," agreed Kittie eagerly, falling right into Nancy's trap; and the two hurried over to the Tub of Fortune. "What must I do?" Kittie asked anxiously. "Just stick my arm into the water? That's easy! I only hope my arm is long enough to reach. Are those shiny little things the fortunes? I—oh, oh, ouch! Oh,

oh! Nancy Lee, you're a mean, hateful thing to make me try that!"

"Why, I thought you'd enjoy it," giggled Nancy unfeelingly. "Too bad you won't keep on and get a fortune. They're splendid ones—truly they are."

Just then Nancy caught sight of Lloyd Mallory standing alone on the edge of the crowd around the Tub. "Come and try, Lloyd," she called, and Lloyd came shyly forward, and unconcernedly, with a swift, unerring reach of her long arm, pulled out one of the coveted fortunes.

"Good for you, Miss Mallory! That's the way to do it," Ernestine Bray, who was in charge of the Tub, congratulated her eagerly. "Do you know, you're the very first one to conquer the black magic of this enchanted fortune-teller."

The fortune was folded inside a tiny glass bottle, weighted with shot to keep it at the bottom of the Tub. "Your destiny is a tall, dark man. You will see his name during the school walk to-morrow." Nancy read the slip of paper aloud over Lloyd's shoulder.

"Goodness, how romantic and exciting!" Kittie stopped wringing her injured arm to sigh enviously. "How I wish I'd kept at it longer! Didn't the water tingle and prickle and sting you just awfully, Lloyd?"

"Oh, some," admitted Lloyd, blushing violently because so many girls were listening to the conversation.

"That's the black magic of it," explained Ernestine Bray. "Now step up, young ladies. Be bold and fearless. Follow the brave example of Miss Mallory and don't let these beautiful bottled fortunes, the work of the most brilliant literary lights of Fair Oaks, go to waste in their watery depths."

"If you'll turn off the black magic of your electric battery we'll get them out fast enough," retorted a disgruntled ghost irritably. But the rest paid no attention to such a spoil-sport; if she knew so much about electric batteries she should have kept the fact to herself. On Hallowe'en it was Black Magic, of course, that made water prickly; and between the charms of Black Magic and of romantic prophecy the enchanted Tub was voted "simply great," and speedily surrounded by an eager, shrieking crowd of fortune-seekers.

"I must go and dress for the yowl pretty soon, so let's try the Whispering Bush now," Nancy urged Kittie and Lloyd. "I know about all the other stunts, but each of the Whispers is different, and I can't imagine what they could think up for me. You see they're supposed to tell you something sort of secret, that nobody but you knows about."

Kittie glanced critically from Nancy to Lloyd. "I think I'll try the Maze next," she said curtly.

"Oh, all right." Nancy's tone was cheerfully unconcerned. "Don't pass away with fright as you go through." She turned to Lloyd. "Are you having a good time?"

"Splendid!" Lloyd's deep eyes were shining. "Only I wish we had stayed masked longer. I wasn't afraid of anybody when I was masked, and I had lots of fun. I—I guess Kittie didn't want me to come with you."

"Well, I want you—that's all I know." Whenever she could, Nancy believed in avoiding the discussion of disagreeable topics. "Oh, do we have to consult the Whispering Bush one at a time? Then you go first, Lloyd."

Her eyes still shining with happy excitement, Lloyd opened the gymnasium door, and stepped out into the darkness beyond. The Whispering Bush was a huge, many-branched lilac that grew in an angle of the gymnasium wall. Two quick-witted seniors, armed with a varied assortment of school gossip and an electric lantern, were at the bottom of the Whispering Bush magic. Neither of these Genii of the Bush knew Lloyd Mallory except by sight, but Vera Lawson, who had helped them a good deal with the Whispers, had given them a highly-colored account of her dear Kittie's

atrocious roommate, and they had formulated their sentence accordingly. So, as Lloyd walked swiftly up to the Bush, the lantern flashed in her dazzled eyes, and from the Bush came a hoarse murmur: "We're sorry you don't like us better. Maybe if you bought a manual of etiquette, it would teach you to appreciate some of our good points."

The Genii of the Bush didn't mean to be rude or unkind. They had merely failed to realize how genuinely baffled and perplexed Lloyd was by her novel surroundings, and how painfully sensitive her shyness and loneliness had made her. Winking back the hot tears, she stole around to the gymnasium door, all the fun of her evening turned to bitterness. So they thought that! They thought she didn't like them. She knew she was awkward and stupid; she couldn't talk to strangers; her clothes were homely; dozens of little things that the other girls did unconsciously she knew nothing about. And they had all noticed —had talked her over and laughed at her. Couldn't they see that she wanted to be like the rest—that she admired most of them tremendously, and longed to be friends with them all—only she didn't know how to begin? It looked so jolly and so easy—being friends. But she hadn't made a single one, except Nancy Lee, and Nancy was so popular —

"Oh, Lloyd, what was your whisper?" It was Nancy's merry voice.

Pretending not to hear because she didn't know how to answer, Lloyd hurried on up the stairs. Just then Jane Learned passed her, coming down.

"Well, it's high time you turned up, N. Lee," she called when she discovered Nancy, and the two hurried off together toward the basement stairs, chatting and laughing, with no more thought for Lloyd and her Whisper.

Jane Learned was like Kittie, Lloyd reflected bitterly,—glad to take Nancy away from her at the first opportunity. Well, if you were stupid and afraid of people and couldn't talk, or enter into the fun, and make the girls like you, why, you must expect to be let alone.

"Time to mask again for the dance." A ghost stationed at the up-stairs door blocked Lloyd's path.

Silently Lloyd took the pink domino and black paper bonnet which the ghost held out to her, and slipping back into the shadowy hallway adjusted them, glad of so good an excuse to hide her reddened eyelids. This second masking was evidently a regular part of the program. Lloyd found the gymnasium already gay with pink, blue, and yellow dominos, and paper caps of every kind and color bobbed about absurdly on the heads of ghosts

and lanterns. The crowd seemed to be moving toward the fireplace, before which the three little Witches stood in a row, looking rather frightened and staring expectantly around them.

"The cat's late," Lloyd heard somebody say—whatever that might mean.

Quietly she slipped into a corner and, curious to know what was coming next, turned to the girl next her with a question.

"Why—why, we're dressed just alike, cap and mask and all," she cried out in surprise, "and we're exactly the same height. I do wonder who you are."

But the other black-capped pink domino took no interest in the strange coincidence; she merely shrugged her shoulders and turned away; and Lloyd, dreading another rebuff, relapsed into gloomy silence.

A minute later two figures that Lloyd easily recognized as Margaret Lewis and Christina Learned came hurrying up to her corner.

"I wish Jane could see them," Lloyd heard Margaret say eagerly. "One of those two is certainly our mysterious friend, but I can't tell which. Perhaps Jane would know."

"Jane would think that she knew," laughed little Christina. "Who are they, Margaret?"

"That's exactly the point of interest," Margaret

explained. "We think our mystery is Lloyd Mallory. As for the double, I just this minute discovered her, and I haven't an idea who she can be."

"Let's talk to them and try to find out," suggested Christina.

But just then there was a great commotion near the door, and leaving Lloyd to wonder over their cryptic remarks, Christina and Margaret rushed off to see what it meant.

What it meant was that the Witch's Cat was coming, also the Witch's Cat's Yowl. The Cat was a resplendent Puss-in-Boots, in an appropriate head-piece, a flowing black cloak, shiny riding boots, and very large white cotton gloves. The Yowl, which crawled close behind the Cat, was a shapeless brown bundle with a huge Alice-in-Wonderland grin painted across the top of it in white. The Cat bowed right and left, as it minced through the crowd, and the Yowl, whose costume made even crawling difficult, purred and mewed softly by turns.

"A little louder, if you please," urged some facetious person, but the Yowl evidently believed in realism, and continued to produce only the most subdued and demure noises.

When the splendid Cat, with the gentle Yowl at its heels, had joined the Witches, the four danced

solemnly back and forth before the cauldron, to a singsong tune mewed by the Yowl. Then they crowded close together around the fire, chanting a magic spell—composed by Jane Learned, of course—while one of the Witches stirred and poked in the cauldron, and finally mysteriously produced a bundle which she handed to the Cat.

The parcel was made up of blank sheets of paper, one of which the Cat, with a sweeping bow, presented to each Hallowe'en guest.

"What shall we do with them?"

"Do we have to write answers to puzzles, or draw pictures, or what?"

"Nothing so very exciting about this," ran the general comment, until, when all the papers had been distributed, the three little Witches chanted:

"If your fortune you would know,
Hold it to the firelight's glow."

Suiting the action to the word, the Witches knelt before the fire, holding out their papers to its warmth, and, wonder of wonders, in an instant the white sheets were covered with bold, black handwriting, announcing the most thrilling adventures which would befall the three Witches in the near future.

The little Witches were as much astonished at

this strange phenomenon as anybody else, for Jane and Nancy had kept them quite in the dark about the workings of the magic fortunes. So naturally they forgot that they were Witches and giggled and said "How funny!" and finally had to be prompted by the Cat to chant their next speech:

"Come, ye ghosts and lanterns, in the fire and smoke,
We the firelight magic for you will invoke."

Whereat there was a general rush forward, for each girl wanted to be among the first to hear her fortune.

At this point in the ceremonies, the Cat, having done all that was expected of her, sat down on the floor near the fire, because her boots were borrowed and very tight; and the Yowl, breathless from crawling about so much and mewing so hard, curled up close to the Cat, and adjusted the air-holes in her costume.

"This invisible ink is making a hit all right," whispered the Cat. "I'm glad we thought of it."

"I should say so," panted the Yowl, adding a suppressed "Ouch!" as a careless ghost stepped on a projecting fold of her brown shawl.

"The smallest waif-and-stray is having the time of her gay young——" began the Cat; when suddenly the loudest, most blood-curdling yowl that even a Witch's Cat could perpetrate, hissed out

from somewhere in the crowd of maskers. It was so different from Nancy's mild efforts and so unexpected that it startled everybody. Ghosts shrieked, lanterns jumped, and the Cat excitedly pulled off her head to peer curiously at the corner from which the sound had come. But only little Sarah Williston was seriously frightened. She was kneeling in front of the fire, a magic fortune in each hand. At the sound of the horrible mew she dropped both fortunes into the fire, tried to get up, stumbled over her long skirt, and fell forward. In an instant she had regained her balance and struggled to her feet, but in that instant her skirt had caught fire from the blazing papers.

There was a long, dreadful moment of frightened silence. Then half a dozen girls rushed forward, somebody threw a rug around Sarah, and before Miss Marshall could get down from the gallery the fire was out and Nancy Lee, half in and half out of her Yowl costume, was holding the trembling, sobbing little witch, who had so nearly been a victim to the "firelight magic," tight in her arms.

"You're not hurt, dear," she was saying comfortingly. "See, your skirt even isn't very much burned. So please stop crying, and sit here with me and Witch Mary and Witch Ellen, and watch

Jane and some of the others hold the fortunes to the fire. Please stop crying, Sarah. Nobody meant to scare you so. Indeed nobody meant to scare you."

But Sarah only clung tight to Nancy and continued her frightened sobbing.

"Sarah, suppose you come over to the dormitory with me, dear," suggested Miss Marshall at last. "We'll rest a while and then come back here if you wish to."

"Oh, will Nancy please to come too?" sobbed Sarah; and Nancy, glancing at Miss Marshall for permission, said that of course she was coming too.

A whole hour of the splendid Hallowe'en party had been ticked away by Sarah's little nickel traveling clock when Nancy, leaving her small charge sound asleep at last, crept softly out into the hall. There would be a dance or two left anyway, she reflected, stopping at Miss Marshall's door to report. Miss Marshall drew her in and thanked her so warmly that Nancy blushed.

"Yes, you've been very kind and helpful," Miss Marshall repeated, "and it really isn't quite fair to keep you now for any faultfinding. But next time, Nancy, do begin to be thoughtful sooner. Sarah is such a nervous, excitable child that even a slight shock is bad for her. Of course you couldn't have anticipated the danger of fire."

Nancy stared at Miss Marshall in a puzzled way. "But, Miss Marshall," she began, "I got to her as soon as I could. That Yowl costume was all in one piece, and I couldn't see much of anything through it. I can't bear to have you think that I didn't try to get to her right away, even though there were plenty of others to help her."

"I was referring to the noise that startled Sarah," Miss Marshall explained. "It was enough to frighten anybody, especially any child."

"Oh, but I didn't make that big mew," burst forth the astonished Nancy. "I should never have thought of its scaring Sarah so, but all the same I didn't make it."

Miss Marshall smiled into Nancy's solemn, amazed gray eyes. "Oh!" she said. "So that was an unofficial Yowl, was it? And the official Yowl had nothing to do with Sarah's fright. I didn't understand that, Nancy. I've been supposing all the time that the 'I-forgot girl' you told me about was to blame for the trouble. I'm very glad that she wasn't. Now run back to your fun as fast as ever you can."

Nancy ran. "Well, I'm glad that's straightened out," she reflected on the way. "And I'm still gladder that I wasn't to blame. I wonder if any of the girls thought I did it."

Apparently none of them had thought so. At

the door of the gym. Jane and Margaret received her with open-armed sympathy.

"Too bad you've missed so many dances," commiserated Jane. "The very idea of that girl's not explaining or apologizing or offering to take your place and go with Sarah! Of course she couldn't, but she might have offered."

"No, we don't really know who it was," supplemented Margaret. "Nobody knows—or nobody tells."

"Oh, I didn't mind," said Nancy hastily—she always hated to be pitied or praised. "I was glad to go with Sarah, of course. But now I don't want to miss anything more. Come and dance, Margaret. Jane is too tall for me to lead."

But Nancy couldn't avoid the subject of the unofficial Yowl. Everybody stopped to inquire after Sarah, and each inquirer had a scathing comment for the girl who had made the trouble and then shirked the consequences.

"Mean and sneaking, I call it, not to own up," declared Christina hotly.

"Just like some people," added Grace Allen significantly. "I don't blame her for wanting to show how beautifully she could mew, nor for not remembering those silly children, but she ought to have apologized."

"Why, Miss Marshall might have blamed

Sarah's accident on you, Nancy, and scolded you good and hard," declared Kittie Westervelt. "After you've been so nice to her, I don't see how she can be so ungrateful."

"Ungrateful?" repeated Nancy wonderingly.

"Yes, Lloyd," explained Kittie mysteriously. "Hasn't any one told you what we think? We're all perfectly sure that it was Lloyd. Makes it nice for me, with all the rest that I've gone through, to have to room with a sneak."

"But, Kittie," Nancy broke in eagerly, "you don't know it was Lloyd, do you? It doesn't seem to me a bit like her."

"Well, I'm not perfectly sure, of course," admitted Kittie reluctantly, "but Jane and Margaret have been watching Lloyd all the evening—I don't know why—and Jane thinks it was she, and Margaret won't deny that she thinks so too, and the rest of us can't believe that any one else would act so perfectly horrid. In one way it's exactly like Lloyd, Nancy." Kittie sighed plaintively. "She's the only one in this school who wouldn't know that it's merely good manners to say 'excuse me' to a person that you've frightened half to death."

Nancy laughed at Kittie's characteristic emphasis on good breeding. "Still, I don't think it was Lloyd. I shall ask her the first chance I get, and

then I'll let you know. Where's Vera Lawson this evening, Kittie? I haven't seen her once."

"Oh, Vera's feeling rather blue to-night," explained Kittie eagerly. "Her mother has just written her that she can't have the sealskin coat she wanted. Isn't it a perfect shame, when she'd look like a regular queen in one?"

"She's pretty enough in anything, and I can't imagine caring enough about a sealskin coat to let it spoil the fun of this lovely dance," said Nancy wonderingly. "Oh, there's the music again. Come on, Kittie, and I'll lead you."

Round the first corner Nancy stopped abruptly at the sight of a figure in pink domino and black cap, sitting alone near the fire. "There's Lloyd now—I'm sure it is. Will you wait a minute, Kittie, while I speak to her?"

"Yes, I'll wait," agreed Kittie. Then her glance followed Nancy's, and she clutched her partner back frantically.

"That's not Lloyd Mallory, Nancy," she whispered. "It's Vera. She's too tired and out of sorts to want to dance any more—that's why she's sitting there alone. Just suppose you'd walked up to Vera Lawson and asked her if she was the one who mewed!"

"She could have said no, couldn't she?" said Nancy calmly. "Why, I was sure that was Lloyd.

It's queer how much their figures are alike, when one is so graceful and the other so awkward. It must be because Lloyd's clothes don't fit well that she gives the impression of being awkward. Don't I reverse beautifully, Kittie? Shut your eyes and see if you can't imagine that you're waltzing with a real young man."

Soon after her dance with Kittie, Nancy did unmistakably discover Lloyd, standing, unmasked and solitary, in the balcony, staring down with somber eyes at the pageant below her.

"Come down and dance, Lloyd," she called up gaily. "The next one is the last. I want to see how you get along in public."

But Lloyd only shook her head, and when Nancy urged, "Besides, I want to speak to you for a minute," she still refused, turned abruptly away from the railing, and must have gone straight to her room. At any rate she did not appear again on the floor of the gymnasium.

So Nancy was obliged to confess to Kittie a little later that she hadn't found her chance to question Lloyd.

"But I'm going to," she declared, "because I'm sure you're all wrong, and I can't bear to have you think Lloyd a sneak, Kittie. Please don't show her that you think that."

"It's very hard for me to disguise my real feel-

ings," Kittie announced pensively, "but since you ask me to, I'll try not to let her see that I think she's any worse than I have all the term. But that," admitted Kittie frankly, "isn't going to make me hurt myself acting very specially cordial."

CHAPTER VI

A SOCIAL ERROR

But in spite of the bravery of her original intentions, Nancy Lee didn't ask Lloyd about the unofficial Yowl. The more she thought about it, the more she wondered if it was any of her business.

"I don't believe Brother Dick would think it was telling tales to say to Miss Marshall that I didn't do it myself," Nancy wrote in the red-covered journal, two days after the dance. "But I'm pretty sure he'd advise me not to speak to Lloyd. Whether she did it or not, Kittie won't be any nicer to her; and supposing she did do it and had to tell me so, imagine the mess I'd be in then! She certainly acted very queer when I asked her to dance, and she hasn't had a word to say to me since. I shall be just as much friends as ever, though, when I get a chance, and I guess things will all come out right before long."

With which comfortable conclusion Nancy shut the red journal without blotting the fresh entry, and ran down to dinner, arriving on the first floor just too late to go in with the rest of the school.

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"It's a social error to be late to your meals," announced Jane Learned in a sepulchral whisper, as Nancy slipped into her seat, which was just across from Jane's. "If you commit social errors, you won't be chosen to move into the Junior House after Christmas."

"If I don't do better work in algebra, I shan't be in the junior class after Christmas," returned Nancy sadly. "Miss Courtney told me so this morning. But what's this about moving into the Junior House?"

"If you'd come down to dinner when you should," explained Jane severely, "you'd have had time to read the new and exciting notice on the Store bulletin-board."

"Four of the new girls who rank as juniors may go into the Class House next term," explained Grace Allen. "There are fifteen of us to choose from, and the five 'who most deserve the honor' will be given the chance to go, the notice says."

Jane smiled serenely down the long table. "Christina and I hereby withdraw in favor of the unlucky thirteen of you who aren't twins. United we stand is our motto, and we couldn't bear to monopolize two chances out of a paltry five."

"You dormitory girls haven't any idea how lovely the Class House is," announced a junior named Mildred Wallace impressively. "All three-

room suites, and such pretty new furniture everywhere, and cunning little reception rooms for callers, and Miss Dutton coming over next term to take Miss Walton's place while she's abroad."

Jane sighed plaintively. "That does sound like a dream of bliss, doesn't it? Mayhap the twins would better reconsider their resignation." She chuckled. "I say, but this is a bright little school, all right! At the three others we've tried, they were always telling you to do your best; but here they make it worth your while. Being on crews and hockey teams and in class houses, and generally in the swim, are all mixed up with being a prod.[1] at lessons and a perfect lady the rest of the time. I may say it's very hard on yours truly." Jane paused and helped herself to butter with such energy that the piece she had cut off went spinning into her lap.

"Social error yourself!" cried Nancy.

Jane glanced hastily toward the head of the table. "Miss Dutton didn't notice it, thank fortune! Social error, Kittie Westervelt! Looking over your glass when you drink."

"I thought that only meant that you're a coquette," objected Kittie plaintively; but the table unanimously sided with Jane, and Kittie, who had no sense of humor and prided herself on her per-

[1] Prodigy.

fect manners, sulked during the rest of the meal, while her table-mates merrily spied upon one another's deportment and voted the "social error" game great fun.

"To-morrow is Tuesday," said Grace Allen, as she and Nancy arrayed themselves in kimonos in preparation for a comfortably strenuous study hour, "and that's the day for the first meeting of the millinery class. Have you bought your materials?"

"No!" Nancy's voice was full of dismay. "I certainly have the biggest forgettery! Here it's been two weeks since Madame Lamark told us what to buy, and I've been shopping dozens of times. Oh, dear! I wonder if Miss Marshall would give me permission to go down-town between classes in the morning."

"What kind of hat are you going to make?" asked Grace.

Nancy considered. "I don't know. A little one, I guess, because it's less work. I perfectly hate to sew, but you can take long stitches on a hat, can't you?"

"I don't know," said Grace, whose orderly soul revolted at the idea of taking long stitches on anything. "I never sewed on a hat. I think I have more muslin for covering than I need. You may use some if you like."

"Oh, thank you!" Nancy was always startled into grateful enthusiasm when her "prickly" roommate proffered a small favor that from Margaret or Jane would have seemed perfectly matter of course. "Are you sure you don't need it all?"

"Not for a small hat. We ought not to waste any more time talking, with a written lesson in algebra to study for."

"But you said last week that you were going to make a big —— Oh, excuse me!" Nancy buried her blond head in the pages of the hated algebra. Nancy Lee always meant to play fair, and if Grace Allen wanted every single second of her study-hour for algebra, why, it was only right that she should have it.

When the bell rang for the end of the period, Grace jumped up, and, before Nancy had time to protest, she had cut her cloth in two and presented Nancy with half of it. Whereupon Nancy thanked her again effusively, and went merrily off to see what other "ingredients" of a hat she could beg, borrow, or buy from her third-floor friends before bedtime. Christina Learned had an extra crown-lining. Margaret Lewis offered wire—"for stiffening bows, you know,"—and heavy thread, because she had two spools. Plain Mary Smith thoughtfully reminded Nancy that she wouldn't get to trimmings the first day, and Kittie Westervelt produced

a big square of dark blue velvet that just matched Nancy's winter suit, and offered to "swap" it for a certain lace collar that she greatly admired and Nancy didn't care for.

"Mother sent the velvet for me to use," she explained, "but I'm going to make a picture hat, and they're generally black, you know. Besides, the blue doesn't go with anything I have, and good taste is one of the principal things we're supposed to learn in the sewing classes. Miss Marshall said so."

"How lucky I am is the principal thing I've learned so far," laughed Nancy, gathering up her handful of "ingredients." "I've just thought of a pale blue velvet sash that I never wear, and it will be the very thing for a bow,—a smashing big one in the back of my little hat. And that finishes the hat—all but the making."

The millinery class was an innovation at Fair Oaks; but, in accordance with the canny policy of the school that Jane Learned had discovered, Miss Marshall had already found a way of making it popular, and of putting the amateur milliners on their mettle.

"You ought each to finish a hat in five lessons," she told them at their first meeting. "Then I shall give a tea for you—a Hat-Day Tea we'll call it. The millinery class will be invited to come in

street costume, and the rest of the school will be duly envious and admiring, I'm sure."

"There," said Jane Learned sadly, "that blocks my little scheme for being economical! I can't make a hat—my genius doesn't burn in that direction. So I intended to construct a creation out of pink cambric, which is cheap, especially if you happen to have it on hand, and perfectly good to practice on. Now I've got to spend my poor, overworked allowance for something presentable; and my hat will be a mess all the same, won't it, Christina darling?"

"I'm afraid so, Jane," said Christina absently, screwing up her round face in her efforts to make the crinoline fit smoothly over her frame.

"I do hope mine is going to turn out becoming." Nancy Lee stopped sewing for the tenth time in as many minutes to try on the frame she had chosen from madame's assortment. "It's so hard to tell how they're going to look after they're covered and trimmed."

"Of course I don't expect to wear mine except on Hat Day," announced Kittie Westervelt, who had chosen the largest shape available.

"Don't you?" questioned Nancy. "I shall wear mine a lot if it turns out well. I hate the one I've got for every day. It was bad enough last winter,

and now it's not even in style. What's the use of making hats if we wear them only once?"

"Why, I don't know, I'm sure," said Kittie vaguely. "The same use as learning Latin, I suppose. We can't use Latin. But we can give the hats away if we want to."

"I'm depending entirely on my millinery-class hat for every day," chirped a sandy-haired girl who sat near Kittie. "When I heard about the millinery class, I told mother not to send me one. So I'm still wearing straw."

"So is Lloyd Mallory." Kittie Westervelt flashed a scornful glance at her roommate, as she made this gratuitous announcement.

Poor Lloyd looked up from her work, which had been absorbing all her attention, and met Kittie's hostile eyes and the sandy-haired girl's rather abashed ones—for Kittie's scorn of those who were still "wearing straw" was very evident, and Kittie had a way of making her opinions seem important.

"I'm sorry—I never thought to get another hat," began Lloyd, a wave of dull red spreading over her face.

"It's been so lovely and warm all this month that it's a wonder any of us thought of it," broke in Mildred Wallace tactfully.

But Kittie had no intention of letting Lloyd off. "It's a social error to wear straw hats at the end

of October," she declared hotly. "You know it is, Mildred."

"Oh, Kittie!" Jane's voice was choked with laughter. "The way you turn my perfectly good jokes into absurd and nonsensical earnest is atrocious. Don't you ever think of anything but the styles and the proprieties?"

The sandy-haired girl was a person of spirit. "I have to think of the expense," she broke in. "We haven't so much to spend at home, and I thought it would be silly for mother to buy me a hat when I was going to make one so soon."

"We haven't so much to spend, either," chimed in Nancy Lee. "That's why I brought my last year's hat, that I hate, to wear again."

There was an awkward pause. Lloyd felt the others' eyes on her. They all expected her to join in with something about not being able to afford a fall hat. But she couldn't say what was not true. And now she couldn't explain that money wasn't the trouble. She would have to let them all—Nancy too—misunderstand her again.

But this time, thanks to Kittie's absurd display of snobbishness and ill-temper, the misunderstanding was at least kindly.

Jane held up her frame, which she had managed to twist badly out of shape in her efforts to cover it. "Look, Christina!" she commanded, breaking

the awkward silence. "Isn't that the beginning of a real creation? You for mine, beauteous headgear! I say, girls, let's form the Stick-by-Your-Hat Society. That means we wear our own make, regardless."

"Oh, Jane, you can't make anything that you can wear," protested Christina anxiously.

"That's an unjust reflection on our instructor," murmured Jane softly, as the voluble little Frenchwoman who taught millinery and needlework at Fair Oaks bore down upon their corner. "Is my hat so bad, Madame Lamark?"

Madame deftly twisted and patted and poked Jane's embryonic "creation," and finally ordered her to rip out the most wrinkled parts of the covering. Then she complimented Christina and Grace Allen on their progress, advised Nancy to sew more and look at her work less, and passed on to another group. Promptly Jane returned to her interrupted campaign.

"It's silly to make hats that aren't fit to wear. Who is for my Society? You, Nancy, and you, Mildred Wallace, and the gentle Christina, who never deserts the ship. That's quite enough to start with. By the time we get the organization perfected, all the rest of you will be clamoring to come in, and we'll initiate you, and make you wish you were Franulated Mufflins."

Between the Hat-Day Tea and the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Society, news of which spread, in a mysterious fashion peculiarly to Jane's activities, through the whole room, the first session of the millinery class ended in a flutter of pleasant excitement. As soon as it was over, Jane dragged Nancy up to the Unmixed Study, as the twins had christened their peculiarly arranged sitting-room.

"See here," she began energetically. "Something's got to be done. It's all very well to dislike your roommate for not being jolly and amusing and your sort, but to twit her with not having a lot of clothes and money and all that, doesn't go down with me. Kittie Westervelt's a regular snob, isn't she?"

"She does seem to be rather inclined that way," admitted Nancy reluctantly.

"Look here!" Jane had a sudden inspiration. "Let's have Lloyd Mallory in at the start of the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Club. Would she join, do you think? I'd have asked her in the first place, if I'd been sure she wouldn't turn me down. I don't know her much, and she hasn't seemed a bit crazy to cultivate my acquaintance."

"I'm sure she'd join the club," Nancy declared heartily. "She does act queer and offish sometimes, but I like her ever so much myself. I

thought that maybe you didn't ask her to join because—well, you all seemed so down on her for frightening Sarah."

"Who found out that she was the one?" demanded Jane.

"Why, you did, didn't you? Kittie said that you and Margaret were practically sure it was Lloyd. She said she couldn't bear to room with a —with that kind of girl."

"Great hat!" Jane's indignation rose to the boiling point. "Doesn't K. Westervelt ever make idle and groundless remarks? We weren't sure. That is, I guess I was for a while, until Margaret happened to discover that I didn't know there were two tallish ghosts in black caps, and that they had both been standing back in that corner where I heard the big yowl come from. I suppose I forgot to go and tell Kittie that I had made a mistake. I suppose I'm to blame for making her think that her roommate more or less deserves to have her hats made fun of. It looks to me as if I'd better get busy and straighten out this pleasing mess."

"But you can't really straighten it out, so as to convince Kittie, without asking Lloyd if she made the noise, and you can't do that because ——" And Nancy went over the argument that had prevented her from appealing directly to Lloyd.

Jane shook her wispy hair out of her eyes and thought hard for a few minutes.

"Step One," she announced at last, "find out who was the other tallish ghost that looked like Lloyd. Step Two: find out if said other ghost yowled. Preliminary Hypothesis: assume that Lloyd Mallory is a good sort, on the authority of N. Lee. Preliminary Arrangement: discipline K. Westervelt. Now isn't that rather a ripping plan?"

"It sounds splendid," agreed Nancy cautiously, "only how are you going to work it? The Steps and the Arrangement, I mean."

Jane smiled mysteriously. "The Arrangement is easy enough—just watch me! And the Steps—well, you can always find things out one way if you can't another. Wish I'd been on the trail when Miss Marshall made her scathing little morning-after speech to us. I could have found out a thing or two then, I guess, if I'd been on the job and looking around. She said she didn't want to know who was to blame—that the girl must have been more impressed by what almost happened to Sarah than by any lecture she could give on selfish thoughtlessness. But of course she doesn't know about Kittie and Lloyd. We do, and we've got to straighten the thing out. Being a Triangler, you're expected to help a lot, Nancy. You'd better begin with Step One, you know."

"Naturally," laughed Nancy. "How in the world could I begin with Step Two?"

Jane smiled again mysteriously. "Probably you couldn't, but to an expert detective like me nothing would be simpler. Nancy, has the dressing-bell rung while I've been listening to the more melodious sound of my own voice? Then go this instant. Haven't I got my hair to fix for dinner? And didn't I worm it out of Miss Marshall that untidiness is worse than social errors, when it comes to being chosen for the Junior House at Christmas?"

CHAPTER VII

DISCIPLINING KITTIE

JANE'S most effective weapon for the disciplining of Kittie Westervelt was of course the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat Society. That organization now held daily, if not hourly, meetings; the school buzzed with rumors of its absurd rules for members and its wild initiation ceremonies; and, exactly as Jane had prophesied, everybody in the junior millinery class was willing to risk looking a frump in a hat of her own manufacture for the sake of being included in the Society's inner circle of mystery and delight. To be sure, when Jane invited Lloyd Mallory to join the fortunate company of charter members, she accepted with a hesitating timidity that Jane naturally mistook for haughty condescension. But Kittie was so chagrined when she heard of Lloyd's invitation that Jane promptly forgave Lloyd her frigid manner. Letting Kittie's roommate into the popular society had given the Preliminary Arrangement an excellent start; and keeping Kittie out for a humiliating interval, if not permanently, would

do wonders, Jane felt sure, toward putting that overbearing young person in her proper place.

For her part, Jane was a good deal more interested in teasing Kittie than in befriending Kittie's roommate. Lloyd was no doubt nice enough, if Nancy said so; but she was much too shy and unresponsive to suit downright Jane. The other charter members accepted her as carelessly as they had hitherto ignored her; she was too quiet, they thought, to count much either way. Only Nancy, who had made friends with Lloyd before the chilling influence of Kittie's criticism, aided by the mortifying Whisper of the Bush, had frightened her into her shell, felt sure that the tall, silent ranch-girl was well worth while.

"I want to like Lloyd Mallory a lot better than she will let me," Nancy confided to the red-covered journal. "Wish I knew how to tell her so. And I wish Jane would hurry up with those Steps, because if Lloyd wasn't the one who yowled,—and I'm sure she wasn't,—we could have a good long talk and settle up lots of queer things. I hate mysteries, except when I'm in them. They remind me of algebra problems. I like to understand people and things as I go along."

Unfortunately for Nancy's desire, Jane was not progressing very rapidly with the Steps. To be-

gin with, Jane did not believe in hurrying. Furthermore, her leisure was fully occupied with the new Society. So far, to be sure, she did nothing except to call uncounted meetings, devoted to the laughing exchange of congratulations among the members upon the extraordinary vogue of their pet enterprise, and to interview the numerous candidates for admission.

Of each of these she asked the same solemn question: "Have you read the Rules for Members through carefully? No? Well, I'll see that you get a copy. Then if you still want to join, you can fill out the application blank."

When a whole week had passed without the appearance of either Rules or application blanks, Jane, detecting a slight falling-off in public interest, called a meeting of the Society for the evening recreation hour.

"We've got to do business to-night," she announced briskly, when the five charter members were duly assembled. "We've smiled in corners and pretended to talk secrets, and let the outsiders invent pleasing tales about us, quite long enough. Now we've got to walk up and deliver the goods. Who's thought of some clever membership rules?"

Nobody spoke.

"Why, there have been a lot of good ones float-

ing around on the wings of rumor lately," went on Jane impatiently. "We ought to have cribbed 'em. But as we didn't, let's begin right away to make some up. Rule One! Everybody think hard."

There was an interval of painful but profitless concentration.

"I never can think when people are waiting for my ideas," protested Mildred Wallace at last. "Why not think over night and meet to-morrow for reports?"

Jane shook her head sternly. "I've told everybody that something would happen to-night for sure. We'll just have to omit the Rules and the application blanks. And instead we'll announce a series of oral examinations of candidates, five at a time—no, four at a time, because one of us will have to be doorkeeper, messenger, and generally mistress of ceremonies."

"You do all the examining, Jane."

"Oh, no, we'll each select a victim," explained Jane easily, "and get her in a corner and talk nonsense to her for a while. Then we'll send them all off and discuss them and vote on them. Christina, you be doorkeeper and all the rest of it to-night—that's a good little twin. Lloyd Mallory, choose your victim."

"Oh!" cried Lloyd with a frightened start. "I

couldn't talk to any one—I don't know what you mean by nonsense."

"Then take Margaret Lewis," ordered Jane bluntly, "because we all want her in, so there's no special use in teasing her much."

Nancy chose Plain Mary Smith, Mildred the sandy-haired girl whose remark had precipitated the forming of the Society, and Jane, with a solemn wink at Nancy, announced that she would examine Kittie Westervelt.

Then Christina went off in search of the candidates, while the others arranged their corners, and Jane issued hasty instructions.

"Oh, say anything you happen to think of. Yes, certainly they've got to wear the hats, till Christmas anyway, and maybe longer. They must use the ones they started last week. If they didn't start good ones, so much the worse for them. We five are the managers, and make all the rules. They've just got to play 'follow the leader.' Scare them all you can, and whatever else you do don't let them guess that this Society is mostly bluff and the rest giggle."

When Kittie Westervelt was notified that she had been chosen to be "examined" with the first batch of candidates for Jane's famous Society, she was unfeignedly delighted. The suspicions of unfriendliness that she had lately cherished against

Jane she now decided were groundless—or perhaps Nancy Lee, to whom she had taken pains to be extra nice this last week, had brought Jane around. Kittie sped down the hall to the Unmixed Study on dancing feet, and tapped on the door in her smartest society manner. She was ushered in by Christina, and ceremoniously conducted to a seat behind a screen.

"Candidates must wear straw," announced a sepulchral voice from somewhere in the shadows.

Kittie patted her puffs nervously. "Oh, do we have to wear hats? She didn't say so."

"Kindly supply antecedent," commanded the voice, which this time had caught the exact intonation of Miss Cripps, teacher of Junior English Composition.

"The antecedent?" repeated Kittie in bewilderment similar to that usually inspired in her by Miss Cripps's questions. "Oh yes, Christina, of course. But—my straw hat is packed away in a box on the top shelf of my closet."

"Get it," commanded the voice inexorably, "and put it on."

For a minute Kittie hesitated, but there was too much at stake, and she sped back to her room, reappearing presently with a rather dilapidated toque on her head.

"I hurried too much," she explained breath-

lessly, "and the box fell down and I lost my balance and stepped into it. I don't care much, because I never wear a hat two seasons."

"Ah, but if you join us, you must wear this hat next Friday to Mrs. Grant's tea," explained the voice sympathetically.

"Oh, I couldn't! You haven't seen it! It's smashed flat." Kittie's voice was a wail of black despair. "Why, Mrs. Grant's teas are the dressiest events of the year. She gives one for us every fall, Vera Lawson says, and the girls always wear their very best clothes. Oh, I couldn't go in this old, smashed-up summer hat."

"Very well then," agreed the voice, now undisguisedly Jane's. "This way, doorkeeper. Show the lady out, and—is it too late to examine another applicant to-night in her place?"

"You won't get anybody to wear straw hats to that tea," declared Kittie hotly, starting to follow the doorkeeper. Then she wavered, paused, and gave one of her favorite sighs—a very, very long one. "Oh, Jane Learned, I—I suppose I'll wear anything you tell me to. I simply can't bear to be left out of the club."

"Just as you like." Jane's tone was maddeningly indifferent.

"I'll wear it," Kittie decided gloomily.

"Very well. That's all for to-night. I suppose

you understand that this is only a sort of preliminary weeding-out of applicants? And of course," Jane added hastily, "everything that's happened here is a dead secret, cross your heart."

"Cross my heart," repeated Kittie solemnly, and departed to spend the rest of the recreation hour in sadly restoring her ruined hat to a semblance of respectability, if not of beauty.

"Fortunately I shan't be the only fright there," she reflected complacently. "I shall have plenty of company, and this hat looks a good deal better than most people's summer ones. Anyway, I don't intend to be left out of things just because of clothes. I believe I think almost too much of appearances."

When the afternoon of Mrs. Grant's tea arrived, Kittie's feelings were much injured by Miss Cripps's stern refusal to put off an interview on the subject of Kittie's distressing ignorance of paragraphing. There was really no reason for postponing the interview. It was scheduled for two o'clock, and the tea was from four to six. But Kittie unwisely counted upon a few judicious tears to relieve her anguished feelings, and excite sympathy in Miss Cripps; and Miss Cripps, to whom tears were as a red rag to a bull, probed so deep into Kittie's ignorance and was so relentlessly thorough in her efforts to dispel it that it was

twenty minutes past three when Kittie, red-eyed and sniffing, hurried to her room to dress. As she interrupted this process frequently to weep, the school had gone long before she was ready; and arrayed in her best velvet suit, new white gloves, and the wreck of the summer hat, Kittie proceeded alone to Mrs. Grant's.

As Miss Marshall introduced her to their hostess, Kittie saw her teacher's critical glance rest in astonished disapproval on the tumbled straw hat. But Kittie, who hated all in authority at Fair Oaks that afternoon, because of the ungracious conduct of Miss Cripps, rejoiced in the disapproval of Miss Marshall, and hurried off to fraternize with the other straw-hatted applicants for the Stick-to-Your-Own-Hat Club. There were no others! It took Kittie less than two minutes to assure herself that she, Kittie Westervelt, glass of fashion and mould of form, was the only "fright" in the beautiful, crowded rooms. And horror of horrors, Mrs. Grant's son Tom, a freshman at Yale, had brought a half dozen of his friends up to spend the week-end and add luster to his mother's annual Fair Oaks tea. It was cruel, shameful, humiliating! Kittie found Jane Learned composedly eating ices in a corner of the dining-room, and demanded an explanation.

"You've made me perfectly ridiculous," she

wailed. "You said it was a Rule. Where are the others?"

"And you said we wouldn't get anybody to wear straw hats to this tea," Jane reminded her blandly. "Well, we haven't, except you."

"But Margaret Lewis is going to be initiated to-night," expostulated Kittie angrily. "If it's a Rule, where's her old hat? And why didn't you five members wear them?"

Jane smiled expansively. "There are Rules and Rules. If you don't like the ones that apply to you, you don't need to join, you know."

"I shan't," Kittie took her up promptly. "I resign right now. I can't resign if I'm not in? Well, then I decline to join. So now! Your old Society is just nonsense, anyway. I don't believe you have half as much fun at your meetings as the rest of us do just sitting around and talking."

"Probably not," smiled Jane. "We're having a spread to-night in my room. Sorry if you won't come."

A look of acute dismay crossed Kittie's expressive little face. "A spread!" she cried. "Oh, Jane, do let me come! I didn't mean what I said about the meetings. I've been dying to go to a spread—why, that's mostly what I came to boarding-school for. I do think it was mean of you to make me come here in this awful hat, but as long

as I'm willing to forgive you, I think you ought to excuse me for getting so mad."

"All right," agreed Jane, who had had no intention of letting Kittie escape from her clutches before the game was played out. "If you haven't got the mads on me, why, I haven't got 'em on you. Welcome to our party—I can't call it exactly my party. Come around about nine."

"But that's too soon," began Kittie. "Lights won't be out ——"

"Come and see," smiled Jane. "Remember this is your first boarding-school, and my fourth. Be fashionably late if you want to, but it's at your own risk."

"Oh, I'll be on time," Kittie promised hastily.

And she was—on time for a decorous cup of chocolate, served from a flower-bedecked table by Margaret Lewis, who had borrowed the twins' spacious apartments to give a party in honor of her cousin. The cousin was a friend of Miss Dutton, and Kittie sat beside that popular teacher, and tried to talk entertainingly and appear at ease, while inwardly she was raging at the cruel deceitfulness of Jane.

But Jane received her reproaches with withering calmness. "I said there would be a spread. I never said it was a 'lights-out' party. Was that what you came to boarding-school for? Well, from

my vast experience I assure you they're usually a very sticky mess. No, you didn't butt into Margaret's party. She told me to ask you, and you rattled me so this afternoon that I suppose I forgot to explain exactly who was giving the spread. Certainly it was a 'Stick-to' party. Not a girl there who isn't hoping soon to be a 'Stick-to,'—unless you've changed your mind again."

"No-o, I haven't changed it," said Kittie dubiously. She had a feeling that there was something queer about Jane's excuses and arguments; but if she wasn't clever enough to puzzle them out, at least she wasn't stupid enough to let Jane bully her out of belonging to the "Stick-to's."

"I believe Lloyd sets them all against me," Kittie reflected. "Jane was always nice enough to me until she took up Lloyd." And regardless of her promise to Nancy, Kittie proceeded to retaliate for this fancied injury by making life as miserable as possible for poor Lloyd. She dropped remarks about sneaks; she announced that if her family were poor she hoped she shouldn't be ashamed to own up to it; she wondered loudly why girls who couldn't afford it came to a school like Fair Oaks, where there were sure to be uncomfortable contrasts; she hinted darkly that Miss Marshall knew more than she was supposed to about who frightened little Sarah. Half her

innuendoes were Greek to Lloyd, and to retort to the rest would have involved an explanation that Lloyd couldn't imagine herself making, especially as it seemed rather disloyal to the sandy-haired girl and the others who had generously come to the rescue of her supposed poverty in the millinery class.

"I wonder why she keeps talking about that big yowl," Lloyd mused perplexedly. "As for my being poor, why maybe it's a good thing that they all think I am. If I ever do make any friends, I shall know they like me for myself, and not for the presents or the invitations home that Kittie plans so hard to get. Pete said I'd hate it back East! I wish—no I don't, either. I want to know more than one little corner of the world. Even if I never get further than the outside of things here, I'm glad that I came."

Of course, it wasn't Lloyd's hostility, but only Jane's determined work in behalf of the Preliminary Arrangement, that kept Kittie out of the "Stick-to's" until just before the Hat-Day Tea. Having been duly initiated in time to wear her membership rosette to that interesting function, Kittie looked radiantly happy, as well as very pretty, in her drooping velvet hat with a huge pink rose tilted saucily on the edge of the wide brim. Everybody showered compliments on her,

and Kittie beamed and declared that it would certainly have been foolish to waste such pretty, stylish hats by wearing them just once.

"Especially mine," giggled Jane, straightening her little brown turban, which obstinately refused to stay anywhere but at a rakish angle over one ear. "Do you notice the meek and crushed air that pervades my beauteous head-gear? That's symbolic of my spirits since the Junior House migration was announced, and I decided to compete."

"You can't wear that ridiculous hat every day, Jane," Christina told her twin severely. "Girls, tell her she can't wear it."

"The very idea! And I the only founder and first president of the 'Stick-to's'!" Jane readjusted her wobbly turban, and departed in search of a less critical atmosphere.

The next afternoon ushered in the Stick-by-Your-Own-Hat season. Naturally the afternoon walk sprang into sudden popularity. Tennis, boating, and other unhatted occupations were deserted by their fondest devotees, and Miss Cripps, whose week it was to chaperone the walks, came slowly down the stairs to find the hall swarming with girls. Miss Cripps had been away on the afternoon of the Hat-Day Tea. Glancing over her charges and noting Kittie Westervelt's picture hat,

manifestly inappropriate for a brisk walk over country roads, Miss Cripps paused on the lowest landing and summoned Kittie to her majestic presence.

"You have a simpler hat, I presume," she said. "Please make the change. Two of your friends may wait for you. You will easily overtake us."

"But, Miss Cripps——" began Kittie, and paused in utter desperation. If it had been Miss Dutton, or even Miss Marshall! You certainly couldn't tell Miss Cripps about the Stick-to-Your-Own-Hat Society.

"A very pretty hat, but not suitable for the present occasion," explained Miss Cripps amiably.

In a flash Kittie recalled the agonies she had endured in getting into the "Stick-to's"—her mortification at Mrs. Grant's, the more recent terrors of the initiation, the many unpleasant battles of wit with Jane—and just then she caught Jane's eye. Jane, with her hateful cleverness, had understood what Miss Cripps wanted of Kittie, and her grin of amused triumph was more than Kittie could bear.

"Yes, Miss Cripps," she assented meekly, and fled, leaving Miss Cripps to instruct Nancy Lee and Mildred Wallace to wait for her.

Nancy was very sympathetic. "Of course you can't stick to your own hat if they won't let you,"

she declared. "If you're willing to stick to it and can't, seems to me that ought to count just the same. Perhaps we can have a special new Rule about it."

But Jane, who had contrived to be in the extreme rear of the walking party, in order to make a junction with Kittie's detachment easier, frowned on any such plan. "It would spoil the whole point of the Society," she declared. "Why, even for myself I wouldn't consent to a Rule like that." She pushed her turban off her left ear and adroitly manipulated a separation between Nancy and Kittie. "It's all a part of the discipline, foolish one," she explained to Nancy in a confidential whisper. "Don't you suppose I knew all the time that they wouldn't let her wear that huge hat? Why, for weeks I've been living for a sight of this, the final overthrow of K. Westervelt."

So it was rather a joke on Jane when, the very next afternoon, Miss Marshall met her outside her door on her way to join the afternoon walking party. Jane bowed politely, the turban wobbled in spite of two extra pins insisted upon by Christina, and Miss Marshall laughed.

"I don't believe I'd wear that hat any more, Jane," she suggested. "It doesn't seem very secure, and then it has such a patient, downtrodden air ——"

"Hasn't it—rather!" agreed Jane gleefully, too amused by Miss Marshall's adjectives to consider the awful consequences of the interview.

"We can't all be born milliners," went on Miss Marshall consolingly. "Don't I remember a very becoming blue felt that you brought from home?"

"Yes, Miss Marshall," said Jane meekly. "So you don't wish me to wear the one I've made?"

"I like all my girls to look their best," Miss Marshall smiled back at her, and was gone before Jane had decided whether or not the story of the "Stick-to's" could possibly be edited for official ears.

"But it's such a perfectly good joke," she confided to Nancy a few minutes later, "that I don't care much. Anyway, I was getting tired of that old Society. I always did hate to stick to things, and hats are no exception. Come and see me show K. Westervelt how she ought to have behaved yesterday."

With the gallant, if forced, resignation of its only founder and first president, The Stick-to-Your-Own-Hat Society fell into a rapid decline. Part of its mission was accomplished: what hat you wore no longer mattered vitally at Fair Oaks, and Kittie Westervelt had discovered that boarding-school is not a bed of roses, even for a person with pretty clothes, the best manners, and the

latest fashion in puffs and curls. But unfortunately Kittie had firmly decided that Lloyd was at the bottom of all her troubles—as indeed she was, indirectly; and the result of Jane's well-meant disciplining of Kittie was only to widen the breach between the ill-matched roommates.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RUNAWAY KITTEN

Such perfect weather! Every morning when the Fair Oaks girls woke up, they congratulated themselves on another wonderful day of it. All through October the golden afternoons, bright with mellow sunshine and flying yellow leaves and the tang of a soft little wind, beckoned them out to the campus. Even November forgot to be gray and bleak and shivery until it was almost over. Up on the slope of the hill the hockey teams battled for supremacy. On the lake canoes darted or drifted, according to the energy of the girl at the paddle. Unsophisticated little first-years and day-girls, who had not played basket-ball all the winter before indoors, and so didn't sniff at the outdoor game as rather an unscientific makeshift, rushed noisily about between the goal-posts. But tennis, after all, was the favorite sport. Tennis had been the rage that summer all over the country. Girls like Kittie played because it was "the thing" to know how; girls like Nancy because they enjoyed it. The Fair Oaks courts were always in great de-

mand; you had to make an undignified sprint to secure one, the minute the recreation bell rang, and even then you were often annoyed at discovering that too many others had sprinted faster. But in spite of the overwhelming popularity of the tennis courts, two, at the far end of the campus —of course they looked a little harder and finer than any of the others—were not marked out once all through the season, and appeals to Thomas the gardener to remedy the oversight resulted only in a curt, "It's Miss Marshall's orders, young ladies, to leave them courts be."

"I wonder why," said Nancy Lee sadly, one afternoon when she and Kittie Westervelt had planned to play against Margaret Lewis and Grace Allen, and then found themselves just too late to secure a court for the match.

Kittie Westervelt slammed her racquet angrily through a little drift of rustly brown leaves. "Maybe Thomas just makes up that excuse to save himself trouble. Let's go and ask Vera Lawson about it. She'll know."

Vera did not play tennis or hockey or basketball. She could not paddle a canoe. But she was standing on the boat-house landing, looking quite athletic and very pretty in a fluffy white cap and a long white sweater, while she waited for little Christina Learned to get a boat ready, with plenty

of cushions in one end, and take her out on the lake.

Vera did know about the unmarked tennis courts. So, undoubtedly, did most of the old girls, but Vera's version of the story had the dramatic quality that gave all Vera's sayings and doings special significance.

"You know that big, gloomy gray house up on the hill," she explained to the group of eager listeners. "I mean the one on the right as you come up from Main Street to the school corner, with the long, winding drive and the lovely shrubberies,—but of course you can't know how lovely the shrubberies are until spring. That's the garden sloping down to our lake, you see, and the back windows of the house overlook the lake, and part of the campus. Well, a very rich, very beautiful woman lives there all alone, with quantities of servants." Vera paused to make sure that her audience was duly impressed.

"Isn't she married?" inquired little Christina, who had joined the group.

"A widow," explained Vera solemnly. "A rich, beautiful widow, whose only child is dead."

"Oh!" breathed the girls sympathetically.

"The daughter was a day-pupil here winter before last," went on Vera. "Her name was Alice. She was a queer, dreamy little thing, and

awfully fond of me. She used to keep bringing me the loveliest roses out of their conservatories. Well, last year her mother took her abroad to study French and German, and in the spring she died over there. Her mother was perfectly crushed. She came home and was terribly ill for weeks and weeks. I don't know whether she is out yet or not."

"And the noise of the girls on those courts bothered her?" asked Nancy, hurrying over the gloomy details to the point at issue.

"The sight of girls doing anything simply distracted her," amended Vera. "Her room looks out toward the lake, and the doctor particularly asked Miss Marshall to keep the girls off that part of the campus. He said Mrs. Barton would sit for hours watching us and wringing her hands and sobbing. He tried to have her go away, or at least change her rooms, but she wouldn't. Being surrounded by girls that she couldn't bear the sight of seemed to fascinate her, poor thing!"

"Is she there now?" asked Kittie, glancing, with a little shiver, at the somber gray house. "Perhaps she's taken the doctor's advice by this time and gone away."

Vera shook her head. "If she had, the tennis courts would be marked again, and the little white gate would be unlocked. That was closed too,

because Holly Road goes right past one side of the Barton place. It's queer that Miss Marshall hasn't spoken about the gate this year, or warned you new girls about avoiding that end of the campus. She must have overlooked it."

Then Christina carried Vera off triumphantly to the cushioned canoe, Nancy and Margaret joined a hockey match, Grace and Kittie were taken on at tennis by two girls who wanted to play singles, but couldn't stand out against Kittie's reproachful glances, and the lonely lady in the big gray house was quickly forgotten.

* * * * * *

In spite of Kittie's gloomy prophecies Nancy Lee did not find little Sarah Williston's "tagging along" troublesome. Sarah was afraid of the water, and she was too small to take part in the other campus sports; but sometimes the youngest day pupils came to play with her, sometimes she went, by special dispensation, to play with them, sometimes she joined walking or shopping parties, and on the afternoons between she was quite content to amuse herself. Being a city child, Sarah reveled in the big campus. The tangle of bushes and vines by the lake shore was a perfectly splendid place to poke around in, playing all-by-your-lonesome games. The seat up in the crooked elm tree was her delight—only the older girls generally

got it first. And then there were squirrels on the campus. When Sarah discovered them, and saw surly Thomas the gardener feeding them out of his hand, she was almost reconciled to the loss of her dear Annette. For hours she tagged patiently after Thomas, watching to see how he managed to win their friendship; then she bought some nuts, and before long she had a real squirrels' court under the big elm every pleasant afternoon. Nancy found her there one day, a whisking gray tail in her lap, a bright-eyed, bob-tailed baby squirrel on her shoulder, and a half circle of her pets standing in front of her scolding and cracking nuts contentedly.

The first one that saw Nancy looking on gave a little angry whir. Then there was a flash of gray tails, and much chattering and a pelting of nut-shells from the lowest branch of the big elm.

"Aren't they dears?" asked little Sarah, politely trying not to appear one bit disappointed about the vanished squirrels, and having a hard time of it because it had taken so much patient coaxing to get Bob-tail up on her shoulder. "Oh, of course I know them apart, Nancy dear. There's Bob-tail and old Whiskers—Thomas named him before I got here, so I didn't like to change—and Chatterbox and Bright-eyes and Crosspatch and 'Fraid-cat. That's all the names I've decided on

yet. If you sat quite still, Nancy, maybe they'd come back, all but 'Fraid-cat, and then you could help me name some more of them."

But though Nancy sat like a statue for as much as five minutes, while Sarah chirped her funny little squirrel call that meant, "Come and get nuts," the squirrels went gaily on with their game of jump-tag up in the elm branches, quite ignoring Sarah's pressing invitation.

The day after that it snowed—a horrid wet, driving storm, that pulled every last leaf off the shivering trees and covered the ground with what Jane called a tricky white blob, which turned ink-black and very watery when you stepped into it. It was such a particularly gloomy day, and it seemed so extra gloomy after all the fine weather, that ghosts of homesickness stalked through the dormitory at afternoon recreation, and almost everybody saw one.

Little Sarah Williston wasn't exactly homesick, but she was very near it, and all because she was so worried about those squirrels. As usual, she hunted up Nancy Lee to confide her troubles to.

"Why, it's perfectly silly to bother about squirrels getting wet or taking cold, Sarah," Nancy told her comfortingly. Having just received a particularly nice letter from home, Nancy did not share in the general weather depression.

"Just think of all the winters they've lived through before you came."

"But it didn't seem a bit like winter yesterday," objected Sarah. "I don't believe they've got ready yet for cold weather. They're such frisky little things that they wouldn't stop to think ahead."

Nancy laughed. "I don't believe they have to stop and think, exactly. They just naturally know about winter and nuts and jumping and other such squirrel things. What's a squirrel's nest? I don't exactly know myself, but I'm sure that they have nests or burrows or some such places to keep warm in. They're probably all tucked up in one this minute, as snug and warm as can be, and if you went out and stood in the wet and chirped to them they'd just give a squirrel giggle and say, 'If that silly girl wants to catch her never-get-overs out there, she may, but we're not going out to play with her in this sloppy wet. I should say we weren't!'"

That was not only comforting, but it sounded just like a story. Little Sarah's eyes shone. "And they'd say, 'I can't afford to spoil the looks of my lovely tail,'—all but Bobby, and he'd say, 'I ain't going out all alone.'"

"Yes," Nancy went on, "and 'Fraid-cat would say, 'That Nancy person may come along again to-day, and if we move, even a tiny, tiny speck,

she'll see our lovely warm nest, and then whatever can we do for a safe place to hide away in?'"

Sarah sighed blissfully. "I should just love to find their lovely warm nest. But it would be silly to go hunting for it to-day, just as the little squirrels said, 'cause I do catch a cold dreadfully easy. But I shall look some other day, Nancy, and then I'll show you."

Nancy thanked her, and little Sarah, almost light-hearted again, wandered down to the reception room, which had a bay window looking out toward the big elm. Sarah flattened her nose against the glass, and squinted out into the snowy dusk to see if she could discover any traces of a lovely warm squirrels' nest. Before long it grew quite too dark to see and Sarah was considering what she should do next, when her sharp ears caught a queer little wailing cry coming from somewhere out in the snow. She listened hard. It came again, and this time Sarah was sure. There was a little lost kitten running around out there and mewing.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Sarah agitatedly, and flattened her nose harder than ever against the window. But no kitten was to be seen. Then Sarah remembered a side door, not far from the bay window. Fortunately it was unlocked. She opened it and called, "Kittie, kittie, kittie!" very

loud and very fast out into the snow. But no kitten appeared.

"I'm going out to hunt," muttered Sarah desperately. "My coat and my other things are 'way up-stairs. I can't wait to get them. If I don't go right now, it may get discouraged and run away, poor little thing!"

Fortunately just at that minute a bedraggled black ball came, half hopping, half tumbling, through the slush; and with a squeal of delight Sarah pounced upon it and carried it indoors, hugging it tight in her arms regardless of mud and wet. When she had it safe in her own room, Sarah sat down on the floor and dried the kitten carefully off with a towel, talking to it happily all the time.

"Oh, you darling! You're awfully pretty—almost as pretty as Annette. I'm glad you're not gray, 'cause that would make me miss Annette too much. I think I know just where you live, dear. After you're all nice and warm and dry and rested—and maybe I can give you a saucer of milk before you go—then I'll take you home. Oh, how I wish I could keep you, you darling, darling kitten! Squirrels are cunning, but they're not a bit snuggly."

Presently the kitten began to purr, then it went fast asleep in Sarah's lap. Sarah sat blissfully

holding it until the big clock down-stairs struck the half-hour before dinner. Then she got up resolutely.

"I'm sorry, dear," she told the kitten, "but we've got to start home now. First we'll go and ask Nancy to come with us, and do the talking, 'cause it's very dark by this time and Nancy loves kittens too."

Nancy was quite willing to help return the kitten; Miss Marshall gave ready permission, since Sarah knew the house and said it was right next door, and the party set out at once, Nancy carrying the umbrella and Sarah the kitten, which was now wide awake and scrambled about a good deal in her arms.

The house Sarah meant didn't seem to be exactly next door. At least if its grounds did adjoin some part of the campus, you had to go a long way roundabout to get to the door. Between the gusty wind, the struggling kitten, and the treacherous slush under foot, it was a very toilsome journey. Nancy braced the umbrella against the wind, holding it as low as possible to protect Sarah and the kitten, and paid no special attention to the direction Sarah took.

"Anyhow we can run all the way back," she said cheerfully. "Taking home kittens is about as cold work as hunting squirrels' nests would

have been, isn't it, Sarah? Aren't we almost there?"

"Yes," panted Sarah, hanging tight to the struggling kitten. "I mean no, 'cause we're right there. Now you do the talking, Nancy."

"I will. But are you sure this is the right house?" demanded Nancy, hunting for the bell. "I've had lots of sad experiences returning kittens to the wrong houses."

"Well, this is the right house," declared Sarah positively. "I've seen this kitten hopping around in the leaves up here lots of times."

Just then the door was opened by a very pompous butler.

"Oh!" began Nancy, who had not been at all prepared for such elegance. "I mean—we've brought back your kitten—the kitten that belongs in this house. It got lost in the snow and came over to Fair Oaks School, and we found it."

"But we don't keep a cat, miss," the pompous butler assured Nancy solemnly. "Thanking you all the same, miss, for inquiring."

"Oh, you're quite welcome," Nancy assured him absently. She was thinking what a bother it would be to carry the kitten all the way back. "That is, I mean we're sorry to have troubled you."

"Not at all, miss," returned the butler affably.

"Rather a stormy night to be out returning kittens."

"Yes, it is," returned Nancy with dignity. Then the humor of the situation overcame her, and she laughed. "I've noticed that kittens are awfully hard to return in any kind of weather. They never seem to belong where you thought you saw them."

"Oh, but I did see this kitten playing around up here in the dry leaves," protested Sarah decidedly. "I saw it as much as—twice." She held out the darling kitten for the butler's inspection. "Maybe it lives in the kitchen, or out in the barn, and you don't know about it."

The butler shook his head smilingly at Nancy. "If the young lady saw the little cat on the place, it must have strayed in. Thanking you all the same for inquiring, miss."

"You'd better let me carry it back," Nancy told Sarah. "I'm afraid Miss Marshall won't be a bit glad to see it. I think she let us come because —— Oh, dear!"

Nancy flew past the dignified butler — after the kitten, which, in the process of transfer to her arms, had somehow or other wriggled free and darted right between the butler's legs into the house. Down the hall rushed Nancy after the kitten, with Sarah and the butler in close pur-

suit. Back in a dusky corner the kitten ran under a carved oak settle. Nancy, Sarah, and the stately butler dropped down on their hands and knees, and while Sarah and the butler guarded the ends, Nancy dexterously dragged forth the kitten.

"You naughty little thing!" she scolded it. "Here, Sarah, you'd better take it again. It's more used to you, I guess."

"You could do with a basket, I think, miss," the butler suggested impassively. "If you'll be seated a moment ——" He waved at the settle and vanished through a door beyond it.

"Goodness me, Sarah!" Nancy dropped breathlessly down on the seat and looked around her. "This is a terribly grand house. I don't believe they ever have kittens in houses as grand as this."

"Don't they?" said Sarah sadly. "I don't see why not, Nancy. If I could have anything I wanted ——"

"Oh, yes," agreed Nancy hastily, "so would I. But—sh! Somebody's coming."

The somebody was a lady who was running down the stairs in the greatest kind of a hurry, apparently. She was a tiny little thing, with a pretty, pale face, great dark eyes, and a long black dress that swished softly after her as she ran. She was undoubtedly the mistress of this very grand estab-

THE LADY SMILED

lishment, but Nancy didn't feel a bit afraid of her; instead she felt as if she ought somehow to protect such a tiny, pale-cheeked creature from the shock of finding two strange girls and a stray kitten waiting in her front hall.

So, "Good-afternoon," began Nancy, walking toward the foot of the stairs.

Without the least sign of surprise the lady stopped on the lowest landing, looked at Nancy with a smile, and returned her good-afternoon cordially.

"Good-afternoon," echoed little Sarah, following Nancy and curtseying gravely as she spoke.

The lady smiled again and spoke to Sarah, and then she came a step nearer, reached out a thin little hand, and touched first Nancy and then Sarah gently on the shoulder.

"Why, you're real!" she cried exultantly. "You're both real! This house used to be full of real girls, but nowadays they're all shadows—only shadows. Oh, I'm so glad you're real! Come and sit down again and talk to me."

Nancy Lee wasn't easily frightened, but being congratulated on one's reality does certainly make one feel a bit queer. Putting herself between the lady and Sarah, whose eyes were round with wonder, Nancy followed her hostess to the settle, hoping devoutly that the tall butler would hurry

back with the basket. Meanwhile Nancy resolved to behave as nearly as possible as if nothing extraordinary had been said.

"I don't wonder you are surprised at finding us here," she began, in a tone that she hoped sounded natural, and went on to explain about the kitten and the basket.

"It's a sweet kitten, isn't it?" Sarah, who had been all the time more interested than frightened by the lady's oddity, held the kitten up across Nancy's lap for her to see.

The lady stretched out her hand and touched the kitten's soft paw gingerly; but to Nancy's infinite relief she did not say, "Why, the kitten's real too!" Instead she merely agreed with Sarah that it was "sweet."

"Do you like kittens?" inquired Sarah solemnly.

At that the little lady laughed. "Why, I don't know. I never had one. I don't believe I ever touched one before. Do most little girls like them? Oh, then perhaps mine—oh, I wonder——" She broke off with a quick little jerk. "I mustn't talk about that," she announced.

She was getting queer again. Nancy got up resolutely, pulling Sarah after her. "I think we'd better not wait for the basket," she said. "We ought to be going right back."

The little lady looked up at them wistfully. "I wanted you to stay a long, long time. What shall you do with the sweet kitten that isn't mine?"

"I don't know," Nancy admitted gloomily, forgetting her haste to get away as she thought of that troublesome kitten. "We can't keep it at Fair Oaks School, of course."

"Of course not," agreed the lady, as if she knew all about Fair Oaks. "And you can't carry it around in the dark, looking for its home," she added, still quite sensibly and like other people. "Then suppose you give it to me. I think I should like having a kitten."

Just then the butler appeared with a basket, but the lady waved him gaily away. "The kitten will stay here, John, and the young ladies will go home in the limousine. Ring for it, please, at once."

When the limousine arrived and Sarah, with a final love-pat, held out the kitten to its new mistress, there were fresh complications.

"Must I take it in my arms?" demanded the lady. "But I don't know how." Then she caught up a beautiful bit of silk from a table near her. "Drop it into this," she ordered. "Then I can manage it. Oh, I promise to be very good to it, and I shall soon learn to hold it and all. Only—you will come again, won't you, to see the sweet kitten and me? Soon!"

She looked so little and sweet and appealing as she spoke, that Nancy, who had meant to return a diplomatic "Thank you," found herself saying heartily, "We should love to, if Miss Marshall is willing."

"Yes, we should love to, if we can," echoed little Sarah with a curtsey, "and thank you about the kitten."

"Kiss me, dear little girl," commanded the lady suddenly of Sarah, and when Sarah had kissed her she turned without a word and ran up the winding stairs, her head bent low over the squirming black kitten, as if she were trying to hide her face.

"I hope you will come soon again, miss, if I may make so bold," said the stately butler, shutting them into the limousine with a deferential bow.

"Well," declared Nancy, leaning luxuriously back on the deep cushions, "I feel as if I'd had an adventure. How do you feel, Sarah?"

"She was awfully funny, wasn't she?" said Sarah anxiously. "Do you s'pose she'll surely be good to the kitten?"

"Of course she will," Nancy reassured her.

"I do think she was very funny," repeated Sarah, with a troubled air. "Why did she ask us if we were real, Nancy?"

Nancy remembered what Miss Marshall had said about Sarah's being nervous and excitable, and re-

solved to charm away her worries by a method that she had discovered to be infallible. "Sarah, that kitten has found a regular fairy palace of a home," she began. "Why don't you play that it is a sure-enough fairy palace, and that the lady is the princess; and when she says funny things, or runs away when you don't expect her to, that it's because she's enchanted. By a bad fairy, of course. And then you can play that the kitten is a prince in disguise, come to rescue the princess."

"What a lovely play!" cried Sarah delightedly. "When can we go to see the princess and the prince again, do you s'pose, Nancy?"

"I don't know," Nancy told her absently. She had been noticing the road they took to get home. "Sarah, is the palace we went to a big gray house up on the hill?"

"Why, yes, it's a sort of a gray color," replied Sarah, "and it's on the hill."

"Goodness me, then I've done it again!" murmured Nancy, as the car stopped in front of the dormitory. And she rushed straight off to find Miss Marshall.

"I didn't see where we were going, and I let Sarah try to return the kitten to the gray house that we mustn't go near," she burst forth to that astonished lady. "And Alice's mother—I suppose it was Alice's mother—came and found us, and

touched us to see if we were real, and decided to keep the kitten, though it wasn't hers, and invited us to come again. Sarah didn't know that we shouldn't go there, but I did, because Vera Lawson said so. Do you suppose it will make Alice's mother a lot worse, Miss Marshall, to have seen us?"

Of course Miss Marshal couldn't answer Nancy's tempestuous question offhand. She inquired exactly what Vera had said, toned down the story a good deal, and explained that Mrs. Barton was now much better, after a summer of travel, and that the chief reason why the tennis courts and the gate were not in use again was because she had been too busy all the fall to think of giving new orders about them.

"You were very wise not to let Mrs. Barton see that you noticed anything odd," she told Nancy, "and to divert Sarah's mind in a pleasant direction. As you managed so well, I think your visit has probably done Mrs. Barton good rather than harm. I'll send a note to the housekeeper in the morning, making inquiries. And if Mrs. Barton should want you to come again, I hope you won't mind going."

"If it comes out all right about Mrs. Barton," Nancy wrote that night in the red journal, now, alas, no longer new, "why, this is just once when

being an 'I-forgot' girl wasn't so bad. It got that kitten a splendiferous home, and Sarah a new fairy-tale play, and me an adventure. If we don't go to see the princess soon again (I shouldn't be a bit scared to), I think we ought to write her that the kitten's name is Prince Charming."

CHAPTER IX

THE UNKNOWN-QUANTITY ROOMMATE

"Jane and Christina, Margaret.
Grace, Jane and Christina.
Margaret, Sarah, Grace.
Grace, Margaret, Lloyd."

It was evening on the day after the adventure with the black kitten. Nancy Lee sat at her desk, her algebra propped up in front of her, and plenty of paper for the solution of the troublesome problems that made up to-morrow's lesson ready to her hand. Miss Marshall had told her at dinner that Mrs. Barton was none the worse for her unwonted encounter with two "real" girls. Nancy's mind ought, therefore, to have been free for the careful consideration and ultimate solution of those troublesome problems. But instead, it had wandered off to a problem of Nancy's own, far more interesting and even more intricate, if possible, than the ones that bristled on page 106 of her algebra. Nancy's left hand held the book carefully open at page 106, but her right hand scribbled little lists of names on the tempting white paper, and it was the lists and not the problems that wrinkled

Nancy's smooth forehead and puckered her pretty mouth and turned her merry, gray eyes very serious and thoughtful.

It was all because of that nice letter from home. Nancy had written mother how glad she was that she lived near enough to go home for Thanksgiving; and how the other girls, many of whom lived too far away to do the same, envied her. And mother had written right back to say that, if she liked, Nancy might bring home three friends with her. Of course Nancy liked! The only question was which three to choose; and this must be settled at once, because otherwise there would be no time for the girls to write to their homes for the necessary permission. The clock in the hall chimed the hour, and Nancy gave a start of dismay. "Oh, it can't be as late as that! I've got to hurry like anything."

"How far are you now?" inquired Grace Allen in her cool, even voice.

"Oh, not—not very far," stammered Nancy, ashamed to own that she had not even so much as begun the algebra. "Not—half through. How far are you?"

"Why, I've finished the algebra and begun my French," Grace confessed with a rather shamefaced air, as if she did not like to seem superior to Nancy. "Want to borrow my problems?"

"No, thank you," answered Nancy decidedly. To herself she added, "It's mostly on her account that I haven't done this old algebra. I'd like to tell her so, and I'd also like to inform her that I don't believe in cheating. She's always offering me her examples and her exercises lately. When I do anything she doesn't like, she flies right out at me about it. But I hate to fly out at her and tell her that she acts as if she thought I'd cheat. I shall, though, some day. Come to think of it, she hasn't flown out at me for a good while. Oh, dear, let x equal the distance and y the rate of speed, then ——"

For the next half hour Nancy's "rate of speed" was extraordinary. So, unfortunately, were her answers to some of the problems. But Nancy forged doggedly ahead. French was easy for her; her hastily written exercise was almost as well done as Grace's painstaking one. And the recreation bell rang just as she had finished the last sentence of it.

"Hurrah!" cried Nancy exultantly. "I'm through in time after all."

Then once more she remembered the troublesome lists of names for her vacation party, which she wanted to think over quietly by herself. "Oh, there's one problem that perhaps I'd better try again," she added hastily, with a comical imi-

tation of Grace's conscientious manner when she wanted to go on with her work undisturbed after the bell rang.

Grace obligingly took the hint, without commenting on Nancy's unwonted thoroughness, and disappeared; and Nancy fished out the sheet of lists from among the algebra problems and bent over it again frowningly. Of course the girls that she wanted to ask were the twins and Margaret. Frowning harder than ever, Nancy crossed out Sarah's name.

"She wouldn't fit in," Nancy reflected. "She wouldn't enjoy the same things as the others, and she'd probably catch an awful cold, like the one she caught yesterday, and frighten poor mother to pieces."

Next, Nancy's pencil scratched through Lloyd's name. "She wouldn't fit in either. Besides, Kittie's going home, and I shouldn't wonder if Lloyd would really prefer staying here in peace. I presume she'd refuse if I asked her."

That left the three she wanted—and Grace. The question of whom to ask had resolved itself definitely into another question—the one that Nancy had been trying vainly to answer all the time that she should have been devoting to algebra; would Grace feel hurt if she wasn't asked to her roommate's Thanksgiving house-party?

"Let x = Grace's feelings," Nancy scribbled idly under the two remaining lists, and then gave a little amused chuckle at the idea of turning her beautiful Thanksgiving party into one of those detested problems about x and y. The chuckle straightened out her face, and apparently it straightened out her mind too, for a minute later she jumped up briskly and rushed across the hall to the twins' study. It was empty, but after a short hunt Nancy found Christina in Kittie Westervelt's room discussing Vera Lawson's latest way of shaking hands, and Jane up in the fourth floor hall, "egging on" a demure little first-year girl, whose roommate had locked her out for fun, to see if she couldn't climb back into her room through the transom.

"We'll boost you up, and the force of gravity will drop you down," urged Jane conclusively. "I did it once myself, and the sensation is perfectly thrilling—particularly the wriggling-through part."

Just then Nancy and Christina appeared, each giving Jane the "highest high sign" of the Triangle, whereupon, to the great relief of the little first-year girl, Jane departed.

In the privacy of the Unmixed Study Nancy delivered her invitation, and the twins joyously accepted, on condition, of course, that their parents approved.

"They will," Jane declared. "Miss Marshall hasn't written to complain of us once this term and our reports have been—oh, wonderful, for us Terrible Twins. We've told mother that you're a jolly good sort of a Triangler, and yet not always in scrapes like poor old Hester Low. I'm sure we may go with you. You write this minute and ask, Christina."

"I'm going to invite Grace too," explained Nancy hastily. She had made up her mind to take no risks about that unknown quantity, Grace's feelings; if she told the twins she couldn't change again.

"All right, but I'll bet you don't much want to have her," returned Jane affably. Jane had an uncanny way of understanding things without having to ask questions about them.

"Jane!" Little Christina's voice was sternly disapproving. "You're very rude. I think it's lovely of Nancy to ask her roommate."

"So do I," grinned Jane. "Wasn't that just exactly what I said, Christina darling? It's always lovely of a person to do what she'd rather not."

Christina looked indignant and turned her attention to her letter, while Jane winked solemnly at Nancy. "At times I'm afraid I'm twins with a Stupid," she confided. "I'm always having to explain my inner meanings to her. I say, Nancy,

I almost forgot to tell you about the lovely new teaser I've got ready for K. Westervelt. One of those first-year girls has a sister at some little old college, and they did it there to the freshmen. The lovely name of it is Rat Day."

"Jane Learned!" Christina hastily abandoned her letter to enter a determined protest. "You shan't have anything like that! Those awful white mice—Nancy, you're afraid of mice, aren't you? Tell her that she just mustn't spill any around this school."

Jane beamed amiably on her excited twin. "You didn't appreciate those expensive white mice, did you, Christina darling? That was at our first school, Nancy. I spent a whole month's allowance on white mice, and then just naturally let 'em all escape at once. I got my money's worth of excitement all right that time. But you needn't worry, Christina. I'm like history; I never repeat myself." Jane paused and squinted near-sightedly at Nancy's wavy yellow hair. "I suppose you wear one—a rat, I mean."

"Oh!" cried Nancy and Christina in a chorus of relief.

"Does everybody have to wear one for a Rat Day?" asked Nancy.

"Do you wear them outside for a Rat Day?" demanded Christina.

Jane sniffed scornfully. "You two aren't even warm. You can't wear 'em at all on a Rat Day—no rats or puffs or curls or anything else, except the hair that grows on your head. And you can't curl that."

"Goodness!" laughed Nancy. "That will make a big difference with Kittie—and with a good many other girls around here, too. But, Jane, Kittie won't ever agree to a Rat Day. She is too suspicious of you about the Stick-to's to have anything more to do with your wonderful schemes."

Jane smiled. "Don't I know that? Why, when I say a harmless 'hello' to her at breakfast, she looks all around to see if there's a dark and dangerous plot lurking behind my happy smile. But I shan't have anything to do with this Rat Day proclamation. We shan't any of us. The great and only Vera Lawson is going to institute Rat Day at Fair Oaks. She doesn't know about it yet, but she is."

"Not if it's going to get her into any kind of a fix," declared adoring little Christina firmly.

But Jane assured her belligerent twin that she meant no harm to the wonderful Vera.

"Why, she'll be more popular than ever if she's mixed up with something that's nice and lively, for a change," Jane declared. "I'm just going to tell Billy Bray about my little plan. She's a

kindred spirit, if she does belong to the Vera-worshipers. She'll be for Rat Day all right, and she'll get Vera, as leading senior and head of the school and all that, to issue the Proclamation. Then I guess K. Westervelt will take notice fast enough! All I ask of you two is not to tell anything you know ——"

"We don't know so very much yet," Nancy reminded her. "Is this Rat Day all just a plan to tease Kittie?"

"Oh, no, to stir things up generally," Jane explained. "They've been awfully slow lately."

"Because," Nancy went on, "I think you've teased Kittie almost enough for the present. I think you ought to begin now on the Steps."

Jane stretched lazily. "Oh, those Steps. All right, we'll attend to them. But as I've done pretty nearly all of the teasing, I think it's time now for you and Christina to get busy. You do Step One, and I'll guarantee to do Step Two. In the meanwhile Christina can specialize on the Preliminary Hypothesis of being nice to Lloyd. Being nice to people comes natural to Christina."

"But finding out things doesn't come natural to me," protested Nancy. "I never can do Step One."

"Never is a long while," teased Jane. "You'd better go now and ask Grace to your house-party.

Because if she should be seized with one of her haughty fits and decline, you could ask ——"

"Jane!" interrupted the horrified Christina. "If you don't stop acting this way about Grace, Nancy will be sorry she ever invited you."

"She'll have to take me, if she wants you," said Jane serenely. "You can't divide twins—not real twinny twins like us. Nancy, have you got the mads on me?"

"Of course not," laughed Nancy. "Only you must be awfully careful not to drop any hints before Grace. I did want Margaret, of course, but I thought that maybe if I were in Grace's place I should feel hurt to be left out of my roommate's party; and I can't ask but three."

"We'll have a lovely time, I know," said little Christina tactfully.

"You bet we will," echoed Jane. "And I'll be as careful as anything when Grace, or anybody else except us, is around. The nicest thing about a Triangle is that you can say just what you think to it, and nobody minds."

A few minutes later Nancy went back to give Grace her invitation. That touch-me-not young lady did not decline it. Instead she turned very white, then made a swift little rush at Nancy, and threw both arms around her.

"Oh, how splendid!" she cried, with a vehe-

mence that almost frightened Nancy. "I should love to go home with you! I—I never was so pleased in all my life!"

"I'm glad you're glad," interrupted Nancy laughingly. She hated anything that seemed like "gush," and from cold, sarcastic Grace this unexpected display of emotion was really overpowering. "I hope we can manage to have a good time," Nancy went on cheerfully. "I've got a big family and lots of friends at home, and I've asked ——"

Plain Mary Smith chose that particular minute to bounce in, wanting to borrow a darning needle. Grace had never overcome her original prejudice against Plain Mary. She retired, first into her shell and then into her bedroom; and Nancy, being engrossed in work, play, and the coming vacation, never returned to the matter of the twins, taking it for granted, in the discussions with her roommate about the coming holiday, that Grace knew who were to be her fellow-guests.

In spite of Grace's extravagant joy over her invitation, Nancy wished several times in the week that followed that she had paid no attention to the courtesies due roommates. Grace's beatific expression got on Nancy's nerves. Her constant efforts to be attentive and obliging were embarrassing. It was mean to feel that way, Nancy told herself sternly. Grace was only trying to show her grati-

tude, and overdoing it a little, just as she had overdone her critical carping at the beginning of the term. Then, on the day before they were to leave, the storm burst.

"We'll have to take the three o'clock train after all," Nancy told Grace that evening. "Christina has Latin at eleven, and she can't get permission to leave the class early. Isn't it mean? But we'll be home in time for dinner, anyway."

"But I don't understand ——" began Grace. "Why should we have to wait for Christina Learned?"

"Why, we don't exactly have to," explained Nancy. "Only I thought it would be nicer for all of us to go together. If we went at twelve, and Jane and Christina at three, why, I should have to turn right around and go back to meet them."

"Back to meet them where?" asked Grace blankly.

"Why, at home, at the station, of course," Nancy told her,—and suddenly understood. "Jane and Christina are coming home with me too. I thought of course you knew about it."

"No, I didn't," said Grace. "No, I didn't know. I thought it was just you and I who were going. At three, you said? I must ——" Grace gave a sudden dart into the depths of her closet, which, be-

ing very long and narrow, made an excellent hiding-place.

"You like Jane and Christina, don't you, Grace?" Nancy called after her presently.

A muffled, "Yes, very much" came out, with a rustle of skirts by way of chorus.

Nancy stared despairingly at the closet door, but as she had no idea what was the matter with Grace,—who certainly had always acted as if she liked the twins as much as she let herself like anybody,—Nancy could think of nothing more to say. Exciting shrieks came from the corridor, and glad of any diversion, Nancy rushed out to join in a riotous game of hop-scotch, followed by a feast of marshmallows toasted over Margaret Lewis's gas-jet. Lights went out before Nancy had more than started to undress. Grace was already in bed and apparently asleep; at least she didn't answer Nancy's discreetly inquiring "Ahem!"

"She's just queer," Nancy reflected. "I hope she won't show it very much at home. Brother Dick perfectly hates freaky girls."

Some time in the night Nancy woke up. It was snowing right on to her bed. She sat up, shivering, hating to jump out in the cold to shut her window. Then she heard a little noise. Not mice; it wasn't rustly enough. Maybe a burglar —but a burglar surely wouldn't keep on being

noisy so long in one place. Suddenly Nancy knew; Grace was crying—out loud!

Nancy reached for her kimono and slippers, shut the window with a warning bang, pattered across the study to Grace's door, and plumped sociably down on the edge of the bed.

"I thought I heard a noise in here," she began diplomatically. Then, as Grace's only answer was a stifled sob, she drove straight at the heart of the matter. "Grace, you're crying like anything. It's something about going home with me. Please tell me what's the trouble."

Silence.

"Please," begged Nancy.

Still silence.

"You see, Grace," Nancy giggled nervously,—"you're like—like an algebra problem. That is, like the x in an algebra problem. And you know how stupid I am at getting the right answers. So you'll just have to help me this time, and then I'll do my best not to make you feel bad again. Please!"

Grace shivered and sat up. "You—haven't—done—anything," she said unsteadily. "I made a stupid mistake, that's all. It was—awfully—mortifying, and I was silly and cried."

"But I'm in it," persisted Nancy. "I'm to blame, somehow. Please tell me about it, Grace.

Maybe you haven't got the right answer to me, any more than I have to you."

"It doesn't matter. I tell you it was just a silly mistake that I made," Grace repeated gloomily.

Nancy considered. "Honest and truly, Grace, you do like the twins?"

"Honest and truly," repeated Grace, "I do. I think they're lots of fun."

"Then I can't imagine——" Nancy broke off short. "Well, good-night, Grace, and don't worry any more about that mistake. I don't believe it's half as important as you think."

Next morning Grace woke up with a hard cold and a fever. She must not think of traveling, the school doctor said. So Nancy and the Learned twins went off at three without her. When they came back, after a "perfectly splendid" visit, Nancy found the prickly, reserved, "alarm-clock" roommate waiting for her. Grace "flew out" on numerous occasions, after one of which Jane supplied her with an appropriate title.

"Grouchy Grace hasn't been any too nice since you asked her to go home with you," she said.

Nancy sighed, and then confided to the twins the story of her roommate's unexplained outbreak.

"Maybe she has an unhappy life at home," sug-

gested Christina, "and got a horrid, disappointing letter."

"But it began in the closet," Nancy reminded her, "when I said ——"

"Begging the pardon of the other Angles," Jane took her up, "it began when you said we were coming too. Nancy, she's fond of you—haven't you discovered that?—so fond of you that she wanted you all to herself."

Nancy stared.

"Yes," persisted Jane, "that's it. She's the all-or-nothing kind of girl. I've suspected it for some time, and now I'm sure. That means among other things that she's terribly sensitive. She acts crusty,—it's grown to be a habit now, but at first it was a sort of defense. It kept her from giving more than she got. When she thought you'd selected her out of all the school to go home with you, she decided it was safe to let herself go—let you see that she cared. Then she found she was only one of three, and she couldn't stand it. Now she's trying to convince herself and you that she doesn't care a snap about anybody but Grace Allen."

Nancy stared harder than ever. "Her being so different that week, and her mistake—everything fits in all right. But just the same it isn't so! It's too silly!" Nancy sighed. "The algebra of

roommates is altogether too much for me. Come and tell Margaret about Rat Day. I wish I'd asked her to go instead of Grace."

But Jane's homely face suddenly softened. "No, you don't wish that, Nancy Lee. All-or-nothing girls make trying roommates, but they try themselves most. Grace was pleased at first, and she'll be pleased again, when you've brought her around to a more sensible way of being friends."

"Goodness!" Nancy looked actually frightened. "I couldn't do that."

"Sure you could," declared Jane affably. "Want to know why I'm sure? Well, I was an all-or-nothing girl myself, till I got it knocked out of me young at my first boarding-school. The girl that did the knocking wasn't half as nice about it as you could be if you tried. Now come and tell Maggie Lewis about Rat Day."

CHAPTER X

RAT DAY

"I'm glad we're going to be Rebels," announced Nancy Lee ecstatically to the rest of the Triangle. "It's heaps more exciting, even if our hair does get all pulled down."

The Thanksgiving recess was past history, and life at Fair Oaks had settled into its regular winter routine. Gym. classes had started; French conversation at table had become compulsory; dancing and deportment lessons had begun, with Friday evening parties and occasional afternoon receptions to give the girls practice in being hostesses, guests, and "just generally lady-like," as Nancy Lee succinctly stated the matter in her red journal.

And to-morrow was to be Rat Day.

Billy Bray had jumped at the idea, exactly as Jane had foreseen she would—Billy loved anything in the nature of a scrimmage. Vera Lawson had jumped at it too, because it gave her such a fine chance to assert her authority, which she felt that the last crop of new girls had never duly ac-

knowledged. And she appointed Rat Day on a Friday quite by accident, without giving a thought to the Friday evening dance.

The Proclamation abolishing, for one day, "rats, rolls, fringes, puffs, switches, transformations, curlers, tongs, and each, all, and sundry similar foolish devices," applied to everybody except the privileged senior class. Most of the victims entered into the conspiracy against their stylish and beautiful appearance with great gusto—as well they might, since they seldom or never used any of the prohibited articles. But not so the Fashion Plates—a title bestowed by Jane upon Kittie Westervelt and four of her friends, whose chief interest in life seemed to center in clothes.

"It's an awfully silly idea," grumbled Kittie, "and not a bit like dear Vera. What's the sense in trying to look like frumps for even one day? Vera says it will be interesting to see how we do look, but I'm sure I don't think so."

"Seems a lot like hazing to me," commented another Fashion Plate acidly, "and that's forbidden. The school catalogue says so."

"Oh, Vera Lawson wouldn't do anything that's forbidden," explained Kittie sweetly. "She believes in keeping the rules, and she's been here so long that she knows just what they all mean."

"And just how to break them without being

blamed for it," murmured the acid-tongued Fashion Plate, who had spent three dull years at Fair Oaks.

In the end Kittie was always loyal to Vera Lawson. "I don't believe you know very much about Vera Lawson," she retorted haughtily. "As for Rat Day's being like hazing, it won't be, if we obey the Proclamation. If we don't, Billy Bray says they'll pull our hair right down. I, for one, intend to obey the Proclamation. If the rest of you don't, why, I think it will be your faults, and not Vera's, if there's anything that seems like hazing."

"Um!" sniffed the acid-tongued Fashion Plate disdainfully. But her rebellion went no further than words. Being very sheep-like when it came to action, she discreetly followed Kittie's advice and appeared at breakfast on the appointed Friday in the sweet simplicity enjoined by the Proclamation.

It was a merry, noisy breakfast, if the girls did have to chatter in French about Mildred Wallace's three-haired "psyche"—"Positively all the hair I've got," wailed Mildred mournfully,—of Margaret Lewis's wave-that-wouldn't-come-out, in spite of the heroic wetting she gave it to prove its genuineness, of the acid-tongued Fashion Plate's absurdly flat-headed appearance without a "rat," of Kittie's shorn and youthful aspect, and of the stubborn

conduct of the Learned twins and Nancy Lee. For Jane, foreseeing a too-general obedience to the edict, had persuaded her fellow-Trianglers to join her in open and joyous rebellion. Two coquettish little golden curls nestled beside Nancy's "biscuit" twist. Christina flaunted a cluster of Kittie's puffs, stealthily "borrowed" by Jane while Kittie slept; and Jane had sat up till midnight plaiting her wispy hair into dozens of tight little braids, and arisen at dawn to take down the braids and arrange the resulting "frizz" in as much artistic confusion as she dared, considering Miss Cripps's hateful habit of sending girls back to their rooms to "make themselves tidy."

"*Vous savez notre*—finish," Billy Bray whispered in Nancy's ear, on her way to the senior table.

"*Ça m'est égal*," returned Nancy loudly, and won a smile from mademoiselle, at the head of the table, for her idiom.

Poor Christina sat next to mademoiselle, and blushing under Vera Lawson's disapproving glances, she had to explain Rat Day to the Head of the table. Mademoiselle was delighted at having a topic of conversation more lively than the weather. She took a tremendous interest in Rat Day, insisted upon full details, discovered Christina's "rebellion" and then Nancy's, and gaily demanded more details, then complimented the

outraged Kittie Westervelt volubly on her improved appearance, and finally left the dining-room with one arm around Christina and a hand resting protectingly on Nancy's shoulder.

"Now run for it!" whispered Nancy the minute they were free. It had been arranged that the three Rebels should hastily barricade themselves in the Unmixed Study till chapel time, and then walk over when Miss Dutton did—Margaret Lewis would knock on the wall to let them know the right minute to secure Miss Dutton's protecting escort. After that there would be teachers in sight all the morning; at afternoon recreation the seniors would probably catch and despoil them, but every hour's delay was a triumph.

But alas, mademoiselle's delaying attentions proved fatal! The seniors had time to arrange an ambush on the third-floor stairs. In a minute Nancy's "golden hair was hanging down her back," while poor Christina begged tearfully for the return of her borrowed puffs, and up in the Unmixed Study Jane, overpowered by the strength of numbers, was being "brushed smooth" by four merciless, muscular seniors, wielding the four stiffest brushes that the senior class possessed.

"Anyhow, you can't make her hair look a bit worse than usual," Nancy jeered at them, as they twisted up Jane's scraggly locks into a buttony

knot in her neck, and hastily departed, by the back way, to their own quarters.

"I haven't had such a good time since I came," she declared breathlessly, when the tyrants had gone. "If only there had been more rebels! Oh, I do wish there had been some more rebels, Jane."

Jane shrugged. "There naturally wouldn't be many, because when you come right down to it only a few of the girls wear rats and things, and nobody but we had the sense and originality to think of sticking some on extra. There are those Fashion Plates, of course. Maybe we could persuade them to rebel to-night. Only they're all such cowards. They'd be afraid of getting hurt."

"Oh, does to-night count?" asked little Christina innocently. "I didn't know that the dance to-night would count."

Nancy's eyes sparkled suddenly. "Oh, Jane, maybe the Fashion Plates think that too!"

"They will, if properly encouraged," grinned Jane.

So it happened that Jane whispered mysteriously to Billy Bray, who returned Kittie's puffs to Christina, in order that Nancy, as being gifted with more diplomacy than Christina, might return them to Kittie, with Christina's apologies for their being very much mussed.

"But she hopes you'll have plenty of time to

fix them for dinner and the dance," added Nancy innocently. Naturally Kittie and the four other Fashion Plates appeared at dinner in their customary Friday evening elegance,—waves, puffs and coronet braids included.

The Triangle manipulated the conversation in Kittie's neighborhood. It was very absorbing—all about a wonderful Spanish waltz that the dancing-master had taught their division that afternoon. Margaret Lewis, who was in the plot, took care of the other Fashion Plates, keeping them happily unsuspicious through dinner and the reception that preceded the dance.

Nobody but the initiated noticed that all five Fashion Plates had senior partners for the third waltz—all but two teachers having by that time departed. Nobody but the initiated understood the five seniors' simultaneous desire to visit the balcony, or connected it with the sudden gathering of Billy Bray and her forces on the balcony stairs. Two Fashion Plates meekly yielded to the foe; two fought desperately against their despoilers. Kittie ducked under Billy's outstretched arms, and fled down the stairs and through the underground passage that led from the gym. to the dormitory, with Billy Bray and her cohorts in hot pursuit.

And then, just as they had caught her at the

top of the third floor stairs, and the others were pinioning her arms, while Billy plucked off the forbidden puffs, Miss Cripps came stalking down the corridor.

"Young ladies! Are you young ladies or merely rowdies? Miss Bray, what is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?"

Billy explained sullenly about Rat Day.

"Was this er—festal occasion a brilliant idea of your own, Miss Bray?"

"No-o," said Billy uncertainly. "It was-n't."

Miss Cripps turned wrathfully to the sniveling Kittie.

"Compose yourself, please, Miss Westervelt," she ordered. "Tears always annoy me. Miss Bray, kindly ask Miss Dutton, who is, I believe, chaperoning the dance, to send the senior girls at once to Miss Marshall's study."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Nancy, when Miss Dutton had made her ominous announcement, and the story of the battle on the stairs was noised abroad. "I think we had Rebels enough this morning. I guess it was rather mean of us to try to get the Fashion Plates' hair pulled down."

"I'm sorry about Billy," agreed Jane, "but she ought to have been more careful about running into a faculty."

"And I'm sorry about Vera," sighed little Chris-

tina. "She made the Proclamation, and I'm afraid she'll get most of the blame."

Ten minutes later, as the senior girls, rather subdued and very reticent, were straggling back to the gym., Miss Dutton told Jane that Miss Marshall wanted to speak to her.

"Great hat!" Jane exploded to Nancy, who had heard Miss Dutton give the message and hastened to sympathize. "Somebody must have been a telltale. Great hat! This queers all my chances for the Junior House."

"Of course the rumpus to-night was sort of our fault," ruminated Nancy sadly. "But it was a lot more my fault than yours. I'm going with you to tell her so."

"I'm going too," added Christina. "I put the idea about to-night into your heads. Jane said so herself."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Jane was too perturbed to be polite. "A nice reception we'd get, when I was sent for and you two weren't!"

"I don't see why those seniors needed to get you into this mess," sighed Nancy.

"Vera Lawson did it, probably," said Jane, "to pay me up for that old monologue ——"

"Jane, don't you dare call Vera Lawson a telltale!" Little Christina's voice shook with feeling, she tapped the floor with her daintily slippered foot,

and then, without another word, she went back to the dance.

The next minute Jane and Nancy encountered Billy Bray, a study in dejection.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jane," Billy stammered. "You see—well, Vera was awfully rattled, and Miss Cripps kept asking and asking who thought of Rat Day, and I'd already said that it wasn't my idea. Miss Marshall said some pretty hard things about unladylike conduct, and not understanding how a nice girl like Vera had thought up a rowdy thing like Rat Day. And finally Vera just burst out and—oh, you know—she's over in our rooms now. She's been crying, and she won't come back to the dance."

"Oh, that's all right, I'm sure," said Jane with dangerous amiability. "I'm used to being called before the Powers, you know. Cheer up, Billy.

"So I'm not to call Vera a telltale," murmured Jane, when Billy had gone. "Just tell Christina, with my compliments, that I repeat my remark with emphasis. Then come back and wait for me here, good old Nancy. I shan't be long, I guess."

Nancy didn't deliver Jane's message ; she had no desire to help on the twins' quarrel. Instead she sat down on the stairs at the end of the underground passage to wait for Jane. Rat Day had been pretty silly, she reflected. It had teased Kittie, as Jane

hoped, and it had certainly stirred things up. But it had made the "twinny twins" quarrelsome and merry Billy Bray sad, and sent Vera Lawson off to her room in tears. Vera seemed to be rather uneven-tempered lately. She had been in the dumps at the Hallowe'en party. She—— Nancy tumbled off the step and stood up in sheer amazement at the thing she had suddenly remembered! She had solved Step One. That is, she had remembered the solution, which she had known all the time. Vera Lawson was the other black-capped pink domino. Why, she herself had mistaken her for Lloyd! And then with inconceivable stupidity she had forgotten all about it, until now.

"Extremely sorry to have detained you so long, my dear Miss Lee." It was Jane back from her interview, wickedly mimicking the prunes-and-prisms Miss Cripps.

Nancy rushed at her excitedly. "Oh, Jane, I've done Step One. That is, I mean I've known the answer all the time, only I never thought of it before. Vera Lawson had on a black cap and a pink domino that night, just like Lloyd's."

"Great hat!" Jane was all interest. "Are you sure? Well, you certainly had your great thought just in time, Nancy Lee. I'm going over to do the Franulated Mufflin on Vera, to pay her up for spoiling my chances for the Junior Cottage. I'll

just run in this other thing too. In about ten minutes from now, I'll tell you the answer to Step Two."

Jane was off in the direction of the dormitory.

"Please let me help you do it, Jane," called Nancy eagerly.

"You couldn't. You'd only spoil it all. Go straight back to the dance, and don't let a soul know that Miss Marshall has finished with me—not even Christina," ordered Jane sternly in a sepulchral whisper.

Nancy went. Jane's keeping Christina out of the secret made her wish suddenly that she hadn't said anything just then about Vera's possible connection with the Yowl. It would only make Jane crosser than ever with Vera, and Christina crosser than ever with Jane.

Nancy shook her head at Christina, who saw her the minute she entered the gym. and shrugged her shoulders dubiously, to imply that she had no news to give of Jane. Then, to ward off questions, she devoted herself assiduously to dancing with a crowd of day-girls who couldn't lead, and so couldn't dance with one another. Before she knew it, it was nine o'clock, and Jane hadn't come back.

Christina joined her on the way to their rooms. "Where can she be?" she asked Nancy in a frightened voice.

"In her room, probably waiting to tell us all about it," Nancy assured her, feeling very guilty because for once she knew more about Jane than her twin.

Sure enough, Jane met them jubilantly at the door of the Unmixed Study. "Well, Christina," she began triumphantly, "now what have you got to say about telltales? In addition to Billy's pleasing explanation, I have made another discovery. I have the divinity's own word for it that she did the mysterious Yowl. I did the Franulated Mufflin on her,"—Jane waved at a mysterious bundle on the study table,—"and, as usual, it elicited the fatal truth."

Christina stared at Jane,—her anxiety about her twin's prolonged interview with the dread Miss Marshall quite forgotten. "You—did—the—Mufflin—on—Vera?" she demanded. "And what do you mean about Billy?"

"I didn't tell her about that, Jane," put in Nancy swiftly. "Oh, girls, please don't quarrel."

Jane explained grimly about Billy's confession and Nancy's great thought.

When she had finished, little Christina drew herself proudly up to her full height. "Of course you haven't noticed," she began, "that Billy was just as much a telltale as Vera. You just notice

things against Vera because you don't like her. You suspected her before you knew—that wasn't fair. And now, when you think you know things against her, you're glad. I—I shall never speak to you again, Jane Learned, until you've acknowledged that you've been unfair about Vera Lawson." And Christina stalked majestically into the bedroom and closed the door.

Jane looked after her ruefully. "How funny!" she turned back to Nancy. "How can I acknowledge that I was unfair when I wasn't? I just took the Mufflin costume under my arm and walked boldly over to the Senior Cottage, and put the things on in the second floor hall. Then I appeared to Vera, and she shrieked, and I just said, 'I'm glad if you're frightened. It serves you jolly well right for frightening little girls, and never even saying you were sorry, and letting the school blame somebody else. That's much worse than telling tales on Jane Learned. Hereafter you shall be known in this school as Vera Y. T. Lawson—the Y. standing for Yowl and the T. for Telltale.' Then I waited for her to come to and say if by any unlikely chance she hadn't done the Yowl. She never peeped. And now Christina wants me to say —— Well, I guess she'll find that two can play at her not-speaking game. Good-night, Nancy."

"Oh, Jane," began Nancy impulsively, "please

don't have a quarrel! Why, you twins simply can't quarrel!"

"We never have—before," said Jane soberly, "but now that we've started —— You'd better go now, Nancy. You must keep friends with both sides, and the only way you can do that is to go now, like a streak."

Nancy went, in stricken silence. When the twinny twins quarreled, the bottom had indeed dropped out of her little world.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRINCESS'S DOLL-ROOM

The next morning as Nancy was twisting up her yellow hair,—in frantic haste because she hadn't waked when the first bell rang,—a stern and tragic Jane appeared suddenly behind her in the mirror. Nancy's bedroom had a door opening into the corridor, and Jane, intent upon secrecy, had come in that way without knocking.

Nancy gave a little startled cry. "Goodness, Jane, how you scared me! I was hurrying so hard that I didn't hear you coming. What is it? Has anything ——"

"No, it hasn't," interrupted Jane curtly. "We haven't made up, and we haven't spoken, and I didn't come to talk about that."

"All right, Jane," said Nancy pleasantly. "Only of course I hoped ——"

"I'll tell you just as soon as there's anything to hope about," Jane cut in again. "I came to ask you not to speak about Vera and the Yowl. I shall tell Kittie Westervelt, and if Lloyd knows what the girls thought ——"

"Oh, I'm quite sure she doesn't," Nancy assured her hastily.

"Then nobody needs to be told about Vera but Kittie. She must contradict the story about Lloyd, but she's not to mention Vera. It wouldn't be fair to—Christina—to spread that messy tale around." Jane gulped over her twin's name, and fled.

"Oh, you nice old Jane!" called Nancy after her, and proceeded cheerfully with her dressing. Twinny twins, who had always looked out for each other, couldn't quarrel for long! Nancy ran down to breakfast, firmly expecting to find Jane and Christina as twinny again as ever. But Jane was still tragic and short-spoken; and poor Christina wiped her red eyes furtively whenever she thought nobody would notice. She did not speak to Jane—nor to anybody else, for that matter. Nancy pitied Christina the most. Jane might have the best reasons on her side, but could you always go by the best reasons, wondered Nancy, when you were going against your twinny twin or your very best friend? Once more Nancy hotly resolved not to be drawn into the quarrel. She was glad when breakfast was over and little Sarah, her face alight with anticipation, came dancing up to distract her mind from the twins' troubles with a message from Miss Marshall. The Enchanted Princess had sent for the two Real Girls to come

to the Castle, and Miss Marshall wanted to know if Nancy could accept the invitation for that afternoon or the next.

"Oh, say this very first afternoon, dear Nancy!" begged little Sarah, hopping up and down in her excitement. "Please say this very first afternoon! And do you s'pose we can see Prince Charming too?"

"I guess so," laughed Nancy. "Wouldn't it be funny if she'd named him that? But she's probably named him Nigger, because he's so very black. I can't go to-day, Sarah, because it's Sewing Class."

"Maybe Miss Marshall will let you skip Sewing Class," suggested Sarah hopefully.

Nancy made a comical grimace. "Very unlikely, Sarah, considering how badly I sew. Madame Lamark hasn't given me one decent report this term. I'm pretty nearly as bad at sewing as I am at algebra. Anyway, I couldn't cut to-day's class, because we're making things for the Christmas box. If I don't work on it to-day, my thing won't be finished. So we positively can't visit the Castle till to-morrow, Sarah."

When the Fair Oaks Millinery Class had finished its fall course, it was transformed into a Sewing Class; and the first few lessons were devoted to working for the school's Christmas char-

ity. This charity the girls were supposed to choose for themselves, at an Assembly meeting called by Miss Marshall for that purpose. But very few of the Fair Oaks girls were old enough to be deeply interested in any particular charitable organization, and the few who were were generally too shy to plead for their pet enterprises in an imposing Assembly meeting, with all the teachers listening. So Miss Marshall's excellent plan usually worked out something like this. First, she made one of her brisk little speeches, explaining to the new girls about the school's annual Christmas charity, and asking for suggestions. Then followed a dreadful pause, punctuated by nervous giggles on the part of silly girls and agitated whispering among those who wanted to speak, but couldn't screw up their courage to begin. Finally Miss Marshall would nod brightly to Miss Cripps, who always responded with a deprecating, "Really, dear Miss Marshall, I feel almost selfish in pleading so often for our work in the Far North. But the cause is surely worthy, and if the young ladies wish to hear of it once more——" At this point some girl who knew the school customs started the applause, and Miss Cripps launched forth upon an earnest but very stupid account of the needs of a certain Labrador Mission; after which the school always voted

stolidly to make its Christmas gift to that cause. Naturally Miss Cripps supervised the spending of the Christmas collection; naturally,—being Miss Cripps,—she spent it for warm woolen stockings and warm red flannel. And the Sewing Class made the warm red flannel into warm red petticoats for the shivering Labrador women,—and confused a worthy charity with the primness of Miss Cripps, the scratchiness of woolen stockings, and the ugliness of warm red flannel. Hence Nancy's lack of enthusiasm about the "thing" she must finish, when she wanted, instead, to go with Sarah to see the Enchanted Princess.

"Gray flannel isn't nearly so homely as red," declared Margaret Lewis at Sewing Class that afternoon. "Next year let's make a motion that we send gray flannel petticoats to Labrador."

"Let's make a motion that we'll send chocolate candy," amended Jane Learned, stabbing viciously at her allotment of red flannel with a painfully squeaky needle.

"But we couldn't sew on chocolate candy, Jane," objected literal-minded Kittie Westervelt sadly. "Not that I don't hate red flannel petticoats as much as you do," she added hastily. "I simply detest them!"

"Of course, because petticoats are out of fashion at present," returned Jane acidly. "We might

send 'em red flannel boudoir caps next time, Kittie. Those would combine style with Arctic comfort."

Kittie did not deign to reply, and a dreadful silence fell upon the usually noisy Sewing Class. Everybody knew that the Learned twins wouldn't speak to each other. Nobody but Nancy knew why. Under the threat of being "Mufflined" if she refused, Kittie Westervelt had been compelled by Jane to tell everybody, "'cross her heart" that Lloyd Mallory had not "yowled," but to tell nobody how she knew. A pall of sadness and mystery hovered over the Sewing Class.

"Ugh! It must be dreadful to live in Labrador!" said Mildred Wallace suddenly. "Why don't the poor things move away?"

"They can't afford to, of course," explained Margaret. "They can't even afford red flannel petticoats."

"They probably don't want to move, whether or not they can afford to," put in Grace Allen sharply. "There, my thread has broken again!"

Little Christina had been sitting quite still in her corner, pretending to sew very fast, but really doing nothing but watch Jane. How could Jane do anything right at Sewing Class without Christina to advise and warn her? When madame came around she would make Jane rip out all

those awful stitches, get a new needle, and—maybe, because she was so careless and her petticoat was away behind the rest—she would make Jane work on it in the big Study Hall at recreation to-morrow afternoon. If only Christina could pass her an emery and a reminder about smaller stitches! But Christina stiffened proudly; she would not speak till Jane apologized. She looked up and caught Nancy staring sympathetically at her. Christina hated to be pitied.

"Don't look so solemn about these old red petticoats, Nancy Lee," she began, trying to appear quite gay and cheerful. "They may be homely, but they're warm. Just the same," she added, with a fellow-feeling for the miserable Labrador women, because she was so miserable herself,—"just the same I wish we could send some pretty things too—some Christmasy things. Toys and dolls and picture books."

"Oh, yes!" cried Nancy eagerly, glad of a chance to show Christina that she was her friend as well as Jane's. "Let's ask Miss Cripps to spend the rest of the money for toys."

"She's spent it all already on those horrible socks," laughed Margaret Lewis. "But we can ask her next year."

"That's a long way ahead. We might collect some more money for toys for this year," suggested

Lloyd Mallory, and then blushed as she suddenly remembered that they all thought she was poor—too poor to buy herself suitable clothes, and so of course too poor to give much to the Christmas charity.

But nobody seemed to think about that, because, just before Christmas, almost everybody is short of funds.

"They couldn't get any more from me, alas!" sighed Margaret.

"Nor from me! Rather not!" echoed the others pleasantly.

"Why, Lloyd Mallory, I've got forty presents to buy or make," declared Nancy impressively. "And of course I don't get time here to make any. Just the same, I do wish we could send some toys with the prickly socks and the homely petticoats. Next year we'll certainly have Crippsy properly posted."

"Rip out all you have done, ma'mselle," madame was saying crossly to Jane, who was too depressed to-day to joke madame into a good humor, as she generally did. "Rip out all you have done, and report in ze—what you call?—periods of fun, until you have caught up to ze class. Class is now dismiss. Miss Jane Learned, I am ashamed for you. Yours is ze work of a child."

"Very sorry, Madame Lamark," said Jane calmly. But little Christina stared with pathetic reproach at madame, and then at Nancy and Margaret, who had sat beside Jane and never once warned her about crazy stitches and squeaky needles.

* * * * * *

Rather early the next afternoon Nancy and little Sarah set out for the Castle.

"My, but it's cold!" said Sarah, hopping along beside Nancy, and looking like a gay little bird in her red coat and hat, with their dark fur trimmings. "I never was in such a cold place in the winter. My mother always took me with her to a warm place. But now she's gone alone, and left me at school."

Nancy, who had been thinking sadly of her disastrous failure in the last algebra test, came abruptly out of her revery at sight of Sarah's woebegone expression.

"Cold places are piles of fun in winter," she said cheerfully. "Just wait till we have snow enough for you to slide down-hill on. Besides, this place isn't so awfully cold. What would you do if you lived in Labrador, where it's just simply frightfully cold and snowy and icy? Just s'pose you lived in Labrador in a snow-house, with only a red flannel petticoat to keep you warm."

Sarah's avalanche of questions about little girls who lived in snow-houses in Labrador kept Nancy's imagination working at top-speed all the way to the Castle door.

This time the dignified butler received them with a low bow that awed small Sarah and made Nancy feel exactly like a visiting princess, and then led the way through one beautiful room after another to a cozy little library at the back of the house, overlooking most of the Fair Oaks campus. A fire was crackling merrily in the great fireplace between the windows. On one side of it sat the Princess, staring sadly out at the brown lawns; on the other side stood a great white wicker basket, with a broad red bow on the handle; and in the basket lay Prince Charming, fast asleep with his head between his paws.

"Miss Lee and Miss Williston, madam," said the stately butler in a loud voice, and disappeared, as if by fairy magic, down a long, dim passage.

The sad little Princess gave a start, and looking around, jumped up at once with a gay smile of welcome. "Oh, how nice!" she cried, shaking hands with Nancy and kissing little Sarah. Then, just like a child, she knelt down by the wicker basket and stroked the black kitten softly. "Wake up, darling kitten," she commanded, "we've got company—company you'll be so very glad to see!"

The kitten stretched and blinked sleepily, and little Sarah, wriggling unceremoniously out of her red coat, knelt down beside the Princess and took him up in her arms.

"Oh, he is a sweet kitten, isn't he!" she sighed happily. "Would you please to tell us what you've named him?"

The little lady looked first puzzled and then amused. "Why, I'm afraid I haven't named him anything—not anything special, you know, dear. I just call him Sweet Kitten and Darling Kitten, because you did. But, of course, he ought to have a real name. Why, how stupid of me not to have given him one! Let me see—should you like to call him ——"

Sarah glanced appealingly at Nancy, who explained hastily that Sarah wanted to call the kitten Prince Charming, after one in a fairy story.

"That's a sweet name for him," agreed the little lady gaily. "And he can be Prince for short. Come, Prince!" The little lady got up, and going over to a pretty tea-table in a corner she filled a saucer with cream and set it on the floor. "Come here, Prince Charming. Come and drink some cream!" And Prince Charming showed that he was an intelligent and obedient, as well as a sweet kitten, by doing exactly as he was bid.

There were other good things besides cream on

the tea-table. Little Sarah looked at them longingly. "We've got to go home before it's dark," she announced, with her eyes suggestively fastened upon a plate of strawberry tarts.

The little lady exchanged amused glances with Nancy. "And that will be long before we're ready for you to go, won't it?" she said sympathetically. "It will be very soon indeed. So we mustn't waste a minute. You see, I've got something to show you."

That sounded deliciously exciting! Nancy reflected that the little lady would make a splendid story-teller. And to-day she hadn't seemed queer a bit—except that she sat on the floor when she wanted to, and understood little girls like Sarah better than most grown-up ladies did. Little Sarah's eyes had left the tea-table; wide with interest, they were glued to the Princess's face.

"Have you got something more to show us, besides Prince Charming?" she demanded.

"Something more," admitted the little lady mysteriously. "Come on!" She held out a hand to Sarah, and nodded an invitation to Nancy to follow her.

"You couldn't ever guess what I've got to show you," she told Sarah, as they climbed the winding stairs—the ones she had run down so fast the other day. "It's something very queer."

"Something queer!" reflected Nancy anxiously, and wondered if she ought to say they'd better not see it.

"Something very, very silly," went on the little lady apologetically. "Oh, something very silly indeed for a lady like me to have!" They were up-stairs now, and she opened a door suddenly. "Look!" she ordered, pushing little Sarah in front of her. "It's a roomful of dolls."

Little Sarah stood stock-still in the door, transfixed with delighted wonder. It wasn't a very big room, but it wasn't a specially small one, either. There were two chairs in it, and three tables, and a chintz-covered couch under the low, wide window, and shelves across one side-wall, extending from near the floor up as high as tall Nancy could reach. And everywhere, on tables, chairs, couch, window-seats, and shelves, there were dolls. There were even four or five dolls on the floor, lying in their boxes just as they had come from the store, except that the boxes had been uncovered. There were big and little dolls, rag, wax, and china dolls, boy dolls, policeman dolls, French peasant dolls, babies, fine ladies with trains, little girls like Sarah, big girls like Nancy, and a great many dolls in queer foreign clothes that neither Nancy nor Sarah knew the right names for. And all of them were spick-and-span new. So they couldn't have

been Alice's dolls. It was queer that the Enchanted Princess should have a Doll-Room, Nancy thought, stealing a glance at her to see if she looked as if she were going to be the other kind of queer—the kind that made you feel creepy—in a minute.

But she showed no signs of the other kind of queerness. She was smiling amusedly at Sarah's saucer eyes, and at her open mouth, puckered into a round "Oh-h-h" of astonishment.

"Go in, dear, and look at all the dolls," said the little lady, pushing Sarah forward again. Little Sarah walked into the doll-room, and sitting down on the edge of the couch she surveyed the dolls soberly at closer range.

"Play with the ones you like, dear little girl," ordered the lady. Then she turned to Nancy. "You see," she explained, "my little girl was very fond of dolls. Maybe she'd have liked a kitten too." She paused, with a somber shadow on her face. "I guess I mustn't think about that," she announced bravely, after a minute. "Well, she loved to play dolls, and she had a great many. We used to buy them together, she and I, wherever we went. It was silly to buy her so many, but it made her happy—I like to remember that." The little lady paused again, the shadows sweeping over her face.

"And these are the dolls you bought to make her happy?" asked Nancy, to help the Princess through the black shadows.

The Princess shook her head. "Oh, no! Oh, I couldn't give those away! Not yet at least. These are dolls that I bought afterward—at first, you know, when I was—not quite—when I was—very silly. I went away, you see, to try to forget, and to grow strong and well; and wherever I went I bought dolls—dozens and dozens of dolls—and I sent them home, to make my little girl happy. I didn't remember, you see, in those silly days, that I hadn't a little girl—any more. These are the dolls I bought alone,—by myself—afterward. I thought you two"—she pointed smilingly at little Sarah, who was utterly absorbed in the dolls on the couch—"I thought that perhaps you two girls would help me to give all these dolls away. I do want them to make some children happy!"

Her voice sounded so sweet and so sad that Nancy turned impulsively toward her, saying, "Of course we'll help you, Princess—oh, I mean Mrs. Barton."

The little lady only smiled at Nancy's blushing confusion. "Please, why did you say 'Princess' first?" she demanded, exactly as little Sarah would have asked the reason for something she didn't understand.

Nancy explained. "It was out of a fairy story I made up for Sarah—about you and the kitten and this beautiful big house. I've told it to her so much that I suppose I just forgot it wasn't so. We always call you the Princess to each other, you see. I'm an awfully blundering, careless girl, Mrs. Barton."

"Tell me what a fairy Princess like me can do with a roomful of dolls like this," said the little lady, as gravely as if she were saying something perfectly reasonable.

Just as gravely Nancy considered the matter, her eyes wandering up and down the doll-strewn room. Presently Sarah reached out her hand to the window-seat and picked up a funny little Esquimau doll, dressed all in white fur. That gave Nancy an idea.

"Why, you can send them to Labrador!" she answered the little lady swiftly. "Send them with the woolen socks and the red flannel petticoats from Fair Oaks. The Labrador Mission is our Christmas charity this year."

"Why, of course!" cried the little lady. "It always is. How stupid of me not to have thought of the Fair Oaks Christmas box myself!"

It was certainly rather like magic and fairy-land, Nancy reflected,—talking to a person like Mrs. Barton, who always seemed to understand what you meant without asking any questions.

"We wanted awfully to send some pretty things," Nancy explained. "But Miss Cripps spent the money, and she got such awfully homely useful ones."

"She always does," laughed the little lady. "Alice used to tell me—oh, I guess I mustn't talk about Alice."

Nancy rushed to the Princess's help again, in her fight against the shadows. "Some of the dolls aren't dressed. The Sewing Classes can make clothes for them. That will help us to hurry with the red petticoats."

"Yes," agreed the little lady, as understandingly as ever. "Then I'll send them all over to-morrow,—unless Miss Marshall objects to our plan. And now I guess we'd better go down for our tea. You can bring along all the dolls you like best, dear little girl."

"Why, it is a really-truly fairy palace, Nancy. How'd you ever know that?" demanded Sarah, as they hurried home, "just about one second before dark," as Nancy said. Sarah was still hugging the doll she had liked the very best of all, and Nancy was the proud bearer of a message to Miss Marshall, offering all the others to the Labrador charity.

Nancy considered Sarah's question. "Oh, I didn't exactly know it," she admitted at last. "But I guess that maybe if you're looking for

fairy palaces, you're a good deal more likely to find them than if you're looking the other way."

"Of course." Sarah agreed rather scornfully to this seeming truism. "Do you s'pose I can help dress those dolls?"

Everybody wanted to "help dress those dolls." The pathetic little story of the Princess's Doll-Room and then a sight of the wonderful dolls, which arrived in two limousine-loads at afternoon recreation, had an amazing effect on the Fair Oaks Christmas spirit. The dolls must be ready for distribution in time for Christmas—"I guess little Labrador girls like their presents on time as well as we do," declared Mildred Wallace excitedly. The Sewing Classes besought Madame Lamark to give them extra lessons, during which they worked in concentrated silence to finish the hated petticoats, and then devoted themselves with joyous abandon to planning and making the most wonderful doll-clothes that Labrador ever saw. Miss Cripps, indeed, complained that they were quite unnecessarily elaborate, upon which Jane Learned announced plaintively that she "gave Crippsy up for lost."

"Why, she doesn't know anything about human nature!" Jane complained wearily. "She doesn't see that in our present mood we'd give the shoes off our feet for her old charity, if anybody asked

us to. And it was doll-clothes did it. Poor Crippsy! She'll never understand girls, not if she teaches here till she's a hundred."

Jane dressed her doll in scraps of the despised red flannel, trimmed with black velvet. Strange to say, the dress was neatly sewn and very pretty. Stranger still, Christina hit upon exactly the same combination for her dress; only Christina's doll was much larger than Jane's, and its dress came off, showing the daintiest possible under-garments beneath. The Friday before the box was packed, all the dolls were taken to the gymnasium for a "show," with a special section for those dressed by the Fair Oaks girls. Miss Cripps had charge of the exhibit, but it was probably not Miss Cripps who tied Jane's and Christina's dolls together with red ribbons and labeled them "The Learneds' Twins."

It so happened that Jane and Christina, coming upon their dolls from opposite directions, discovered the ribbons and the label at exactly the same minute. Instinctively Jane, who always knew where Christina was, looked across at her twin; and Christina, who kept a constant but furtive watch over Jane, looked back. Instinctively both smiled and opened their mouths to speak. Just in time both remembered.

"How silly!" said Christina scornfully, pointedly addressing her comment to Mildred Wallace.

Jane, shutting her lips tight, untied the ribbon, pulled off the objectionable sign, and crumpled them into a tight little wad in her hand.

Nancy Lee, watching, gave an impatient toss of her yellow head. "Oh, I thought that trap would surely work!" she sighed to herself. "Why, it's been weeks that those silly twins haven't spoken."

"Poor things!" whispered Margaret Lewis in her ear. Margaret had helped Nancy with the dolls' label. "Our lovely trap almost worked, Nancy. We'll have to think of another that they'll just walk into in spite of themselves."

Nancy nodded. "Before the Christmas vacation, too, to have it off our minds, and that leaves us only ten days. It's lucky you've got brains, Maggie Lewis. I never can think of another trap. I just happened to think of this one."

"Well, just happen to think again," advised Margaret cheerfully. "Or maybe they'll happen to walk into one themselves. I notice a lot of good things in this world are just accidents."

"I guess Christina wishes she'd have that kind of an accident," sighed Nancy, whose tender heart was wrung by the sight of the smaller twin's evident unhappiness. "Well, we've done all we can to-night, for certain, so come along now and look at the other dolls."

CHAPTER XII

JELLY-ROLL ON THE STAIRS

The day after the Doll Show Christina Learned went down to Margaret's room at afternoon recreation, ostensibly to ask about an algebra problem, but really to escape from the surcharged atmosphere of the Unmixed Study.

In Margaret's room she found Mildred Wallace, proudly displaying a copy of Vera Lawson's latest photograph. To Christina's surprise, Margaret was loud in her admiration of Vera's beauty—Margaret, who had confided to the twins that she simply couldn't think of Kittie Westervelt as pretty, after the way she had treated Lloyd, because she wasn't "pretty inside." And yet Margaret must know about Vera's being the Yowl. She was surely one of the first girls that Jane would have told of her discovery.

When Mildred had gone off to display her treasure elsewhere, Christina began cautiously to "sound" Margaret.

"So you still think Vera Lawson is pretty?" she began.

"Still think she's pretty?" laughed Margaret. "Why, how could I think she wasn't, Christina?"

"Well, you said that people who weren't 'pretty inside'——" began Christina.

Margaret laughed again. "I remember—when we were talking about Kittie. But Vera Lawson isn't like Kittie. She's rather a snob, but she's been brought up that way, I suppose. And sometimes she's rather unkind, but I don't think she ever means to be. Of course I don't know her well, and I do know all about the way Kittie has treated poor Lloyd Mallory. I hope I shall never know anything about Vera that will spoil her wonderful beauty for me." Margaret twisted her sweet, sensible face into an absurd grimace. "An ugly brown mug like mine does just love to watch a thing of beauty like Vera Lawson. On principle I despise the Vera-worshipers, as Jane calls them; but in practice the girl with that angel face can have me. There, Christina! Don't betray me to Jane!"

"I—ca—won't, of course," promised Christina, and escaped as soon as she could to Nancy's study, where she had the good luck to find that young person alone, engaged in a frantic effort to make the demands of her lengthy Christmas list accord with her short supply of cash on hand.

"Hello, Christina!" she called, when she saw

her visitor. "Come in. I said nobody should, because I'm busy, but maybe you can help me. What can a girl give to her nice brother Dick that doesn't cost much?"

Christina ignored both Nancy's mixed antecedents and her anxiety. "I want to know," she began eagerly, not even stopping to sit down, "if you've told anybody about Vera and the Yowl."

Nancy shook her yellow head calmly. "Not a soul, of course. It wasn't my story."

"Hasn't Jane told?"

"Only Kittie. At least, she said she should tell her, to make her stop blaming the Yowl on Lloyd. She also said it wouldn't be 'fair to you' to tell any others, besides just Kittie, who needed to know."

"Oh!" Christina gasped finally. "Thank you, Nancy."

"Don't thank me," returned Nancy hastily. "Thank Jane."

Christina stared somberly at Nancy for a moment, her round face convulsed with warning emotions.

"I can't thank her," she burst out at last, and started slowly off.

"You can't *not*, you mean," Nancy told her visitor sharply.

Christina paused, and turned her white face

upon Nancy. "Please don't make me quarrel with you too," she begged. "We've got to settle this ourselves, Jane and I. Oh—d-e-a-r!"

There were gay voices in the hall. Christina dashed across into the Unmixed Study, which was now empty, and from there to the dark bedroom beyond.

"Just the same, she can't *not* thank Jane," Nancy repeated to herself. "Oh, dear, she's mixed me all up about Dick's present. Guess I'll go out with the crowd and play."

Though you knew it was just the time when you ought to work your hardest and be on your best behavior, with final term-tests ahead and the choice of the five new Junior House inmates imminent, it was impossible, those last days before vacation, to take things seriously. If "finals" were ahead of you, so was Christmas. Who could care much about going into the Junior House when she was going home—in ten days—a week —six—five—four—three, two days? Nancy joyously noted their passing in the red journal, and she made little Sarah a long line of paper dolls to tear off her days from. For Sarah was going home, though only Annette and Cook would be there to welcome her. Fortunately Sarah didn't seem to mind this sad state of things as much as the older girls minded it for her. Christina, who now

poured out all her thwarted affection on the Smallest Waif-and-Stray, was particularly indignant.

"I think she feels just awfully," Christina told Nancy. "But she won't let us see, for fear we'll blame that beautiful mother of hers. I hope Cook knows how to cuddle homesick babies, whose mothers have nerves. Just suppose Annette should get lost before Sarah arrives upon the scene. Kittens are forever getting lost."

"The Triangle ought to stick a comical Christmas box in her trunk," suggested Nancy.

"All right. I'll help about anything you and—anything the rest of you want," agreed Christina.

Jane planned the box, of course,—it took Jane to plan a surprise-package, with Nancy at her elbow to suggest fitting the things into Sarah's favorite fairy-tales, and Kittie Westervelt, who had younger sisters at home, to give a little practical advice. The trunks were all brought down early, and Sarah's was packed a day in advance, because the maid who did it for her would be too busy later. So it was easy for Nancy to borrow the key from Sarah "for safe-keeping," and for Nancy, Jane, and Kittie—Christina having stoutly refused to go, either with or without Jane, because one course would be selfish, and the

other an overture of friendship,—to slip down just before "lights out" and tuck the funny, bulgy, exciting-looking parcel, marked "Open Christmas Morning as Early as Ever You Like," into Sarah's top tray.

"Goodness, but I'm hungry," said Kittie, as they started up-stairs again, glancing longingly down the corridor toward the dark, empty dining-room.

"Hungry doesn't express what I am," echoed Jane. "Got any left-over eats up-stairs, Nancy Lee?"

Nancy had not. Neither had Kittie. Jane, who had brought a box of matches along with her for emergencies, fingered it thoughtfully. "We might just look in the pantry," she suggested. "I never so much as saw the Fair Oaks pantry. Great record that, for J. Learned, Champeen Food-Snatcher of the Eastern Boarding School Circuit."

The three girls tiptoed softly across the long dining-room into a dark entry, where the flash of one of Jane's matches gave Kittie and Nancy each time to open a door.

"Nothing but dishes there," announced Nancy briefly.

"This way!" squeaked Kittie joyously. "Look, girls! Dozens of elegant jelly-rolls!"

"Um-m!" sighed famished Jane, striking another match.

"Don't they look good!" sighed Nancy.

Jane left them in darkness while she reviewed the situation.

"Those cakes are for to-morrow's luncheon, and we're leaving at twelve-fifteen. So are lots of others. Therefore the jelly-rolls will get stale. Therefore we'll eat one to-night, to save it. We'll eat it cozily up-stairs."

"Suppose we meet somebody, Jane?" suggested Nancy timidly.

"Oh, we'll explain and invite 'em to the party."

"Not if we meet a teacher," objected the literal-minded Kittie, who had not lost her distrust of Jane's strange logic.

Jane felt around in the dark for Kittie's hand. "You take the matches," she ordered, "and I'll take the cake. We shan't meet a teacher—trust the Learned luck for that. Besides, it's perfectly square to eat our luncheon ahead of time. Isn't it, Nancy Lee?"

"Why, y-e-es, I guess so," agreed Nancy rather doubtfully.

A door slammed somewhere outside, and silence fell upon the three conspirators. After a moment Jane, having, in the interval, secured a jelly-roll, poked her head out into the passage.

"Coast clear," she whispered, and the others followed her across the dining-room. They were halfway up the first stairway when Miss Cripps, who had charge of the lower halls, put out the light.

"You belong in your own rooms, young ladies," she called up to the hurrying figures on the stairs.

"Yes, Miss Cripps," Jane called back in such a funny, disguised voice that Nancy giggled audibly in spite of herself.

The second-floor light was still burning—Miss Dutton was never so prompt about putting it out as Miss Cripps.

"Hurry now!" whispered Jane. "We must gain the upper landing with the speed of young gazelles. And above all keep close together in case of need." Jane giggled hysterically. "Kittie's really too small for a man-sized jelly-roll to hide behind."

As they approached the foot of the last stairway they were all looking back over their shoulders toward Miss Dutton's door. In her eagerness to obey Jane's orders, Kittie got too close. Jane ran into her, stumbled over the lowest step, and the jelly-roll shot off its plate and landed, a good deal unrolled, two stairs higher up.

"Great hat!" said Jane, reaching to rescue it. "The Learned luck doesn't seem to be working to-night—I guess maybe it's not my luck, you

know. It may belong to—to other members of the family. Great hat, how this cake sticks!" There was a rustle over her head and Jane, depositing the battered jelly-roll on its plate, looked up just in time to see her dazed companions staring in wide-eyed horror at Miss Marshall, coming straight down upon them. It was much too late to hide the jelly-roll. Jane tried to appear jaunty and unconcerned about it.

"I dropped this cake on the stairs. By mistake," she added blandly. "It's a jelly-roll—or it was, till I dropped it."

Wearing her haughtiest, most distant expression, Miss Marshall looked from the cake to Jane, from Jane to Kittie, and from Kittie to Nancy. Then suddenly she smiled.

"Another case of the 'I-forgot girl'?" she inquired briskly of Nancy.

Nancy nodded blushingly. "I—I guess so, Miss Marshall. You see—we were leaving a present for Sarah, and we were hungry, and we looked in the pantry and found lots of cake, and we thought that, as we shouldn't be here for luncheon to-morrow, it would be all right to take some now ——"

Nancy stopped to draw a long breath. "It sounds awfully silly, Miss Marshall."

"Doesn't it?" agreed Miss Marshall cordially.

"Now, as your cake doesn't look very appetizing, come down with me and see what else we can find to eat."

"Oh, no, thank you, Miss Marshall!" cried Kittie, in consternation at the prospect.

"We wouldn't trouble you, not for anything," put in Jane hastily.

"No, indeed!" echoed Nancy.

But Miss Marshall smilingly insisted, and three shamedfaced girls choked down dainty bread-and-butter sandwiches, glasses of creamy milk, and huge slices of a fresh jelly-roll, while Miss Marshall sat opposite them, talking animatedly and hospitably urging them to eat all they wanted.

"As a matter of fact, you are all to have lunch here to-morrow," she explained, "no matter if you are leaving a little before the usual hour. But the cook can easily make extra cake for that. Let me have that unfortunate jelly-roll, Miss Learned. Thank you. And now, if you have had quite enough—I have several important announcements to make ready for to-morrow's Assembly. Good-night!"

"Several important announcements! That means the Junior House list!" groaned Jane, when they were out of hearing. "I'm awfully sorry, girls. This unhappy party was mostly my fault."

"Oh, no, it wasn't, Jane," Nancy reassured her generously. "Besides, perhaps we shouldn't have been on the Junior House list anyway."

"Oh, I'm sure I should!" Kittie sighed miserably. "I've tried so hard to obey all the rules."

"Luckily there's no rule against being mean to your roommate," muttered Jane vindictively. "But how about that condition in English Comp., Miss K. Westervelt?"

Whereat Kittie, who had not supposed that anybody knew of Miss Cripps's outrageous injustice in conditioning her theme-work, undisguisedly wept.

"Scholarship counts for the Junior House, you know," Jane rubbed it in. "So don't accuse me of having craftily plotted your downfall, Kittie."

When the Fair Oaks girls filed in to breakfast the next morning, a battered jelly-roll, dusty and disheveled, stood conspicuously on the mahogany sideboard near the dining-room door. Jane's unwonted lack of interest in the mystery surrounding its appearance there brought her under instant suspicion. Nancy, exchanging glances with Jane, was driven by Billy Bray's merciless cross-questioning to admit her guilt; and Kittie, who had blushed for no good reason when she saw the cake, was unable to bear the scornful stare of her adored

Vera, choked over her cereal, and left the dining-room in tears.

"Little goose!" muttered Jane wrathfully. "Nobody could have any luck with her along."

"I guess we didn't deserve any luck, Jane," said Nancy.

"Sure we didn't," agreed Jane. "We didn't deserve that elegant spread, either. Gee, but Miss Marshall knows how to make you feel like twenty-nine cents!"

Assembly seats were assigned by classes and alphabetically. Therefore the twinny twins were sitting silently side by side, with Nancy next to Jane and Margaret Lewis next to Nancy, when Miss Marshall read the list of girls who might move into the Junior House after Christmas. Margaret Lewis was one, and Mildred Wallace, and Plain Mary Smith; and the last name on the list was Christina Learned's. When Christina's name was read, there was the same little rustle of congratulation that had greeted the others; so nobody but the girls nearest her heard Christina's stifled cry of dismay.

She leaned across Jane to Nancy and Margaret. "Oh, I can't go without—I can't go alone! What can I do? Tell her that I can't go, Nancy. Tell her right now. Please!" Christina's face worked convulsively, and the next minute she had hid-

den it from public view—on her twin's shoulder.

Jane slipped an arm around her sister, and patted her comfortingly.

"You tell her that I can't go, Jane," whispered Christina.

"Sure I'll tell her," answered Jane. "Buck up, Christina! Don't make a sight of yourself. She's a good sort—she'll understand like a flash. She just wanted to give you the chance to go, dearie, seeing you deserved it. But she won't make you go. Buck up, twin!"

"Ye-es, Jane," promised Christina faintly, feeling around for a handkerchief. Jane proffered hers.

The minute Assembly was over the Learned twins, arm in arm, stormed Miss Marshall's office.

"She's very busy to-day," Miss Dutton, who was in charge of the anteroom, told them. "Can't you wait till after vacation?"

Jane shook her head decidedly. "No, indeed, Miss Dutton. It's awfully important for us to see her right away."

"Indeed, it is, Miss Dutton," echoed Christina anxiously.

So they were admitted, and Jane set forth their case. Miss Marshall hesitated.

"You know you're hardly in a position to ask

a favor of me, Miss Learned," she told Jane rather sharply.

But at Christina's despairing "Oh, please, Miss Marshall!" she capitulated and sent them off happy, with a smiling caution to Jane to try, hereafter, to live up to her twin.

"At least I haven't dragged her down with me," retorted Jane, perceiving a sympathetic twinkle in Miss Marshall's fine eyes.

"But I'll take good care to drag you down with me hereafter," she promised Christina, as she pulled her into an ecstatic hornpipe up and down the Unmixed Study.

Down the corridor Nancy was listening to Kittie's latest tale of woe.

"I wish I could control my tears better," that young person concluded her tragic story. "I don't want to give Jane so many chances to call me the modern Niobe. That's one good thing about Lloyd; she never shows how she feels. She's going to spend Christmas here, you know; but Miss Marshall forgot and her trunk was brought down with the rest. And this morning, somebody —honestly, Nancy, I didn't even know about it till Lloyd showed me—somebody labeled it 'Miss Oddity,' in great big chalk letters, all over the top and the sides. She found it just now when we got back from Assembly, and she felt it, Nancy, just as

you or I would. But she just marched into her room after a wet towel and rubbed off the letters. 'Lucky I wasn't going home,' she said to me. 'Father and Pete and the boys at the ranch would have felt bad about that, because they knew I wanted to make friends at school. They wouldn't realize that it's true that I am "Miss Oddity."' We all have our troubles, Nancy. I felt for Lloyd, because I am in so deep to-day myself."

"Where is Lloyd now?" demanded Nancy.

Kittie, who was packing while she talked, pointed at Lloyd's bedroom door, and Nancy, with a little shrug indicating an unpleasant duty to be faced, walked up to it and knocked.

"I say, Lloyd," she began, "Kittie told me that you felt bad about the writing on your trunk. I don't know anything about it except what she told me, but I'm sure nobody meant to be unkind. And you mustn't think you're queer. You're nice."

Lloyd smiled faintly at Nancy's eagerness. "Can't a person ever be both?" she asked. "Because I certainly am queer. Miss Marshall told me so last night. She sent for me and said I was eligible for the Junior House, but that she thought I'd better stay here, because my education had been 'peculiar' and I needed 'social contact' more than book lessons. That was just another way of calling me 'Miss Oddity.'"

"If you wanted to get away from Kittie, why didn't you tell Miss Marshall so?" demanded downright Nancy.

"You know why," smiled Lloyd. "Kittie isn't to blame for not liking a queer roommate—a freak—you call girls like me. I'm sorry for her, and I'm certainly not going to get her into trouble. I may be queer, but I play fair."

"Of course you do, and in the end you'll win out," declared Nancy, with a hearty hand-shake and a "Merry Christmas." By the time she had done a frenzied half-hour's packing, managed to recite creditably in algebra, eaten lunch (with a blushing refusal to partake of jelly-roll), and caught the twelve-fifteen, Nancy had quite forgotten Lloyd and the "Miss Oddity" labels. But Nancy's parting speech cheered Lloyd's whole lonely vacation. It braced her to play her part in the little circle of girls who, like herself, were stranded at Fair Oaks over Christmas; and it gave her hope and courage with which to begin a new year's struggle with her uncongenial environment.

CHAPTER XIII

HO FOR A MASQUE!

It was just perfectly horrid when the time came that you must start back to school! It gave you a sick, empty feeling to say good-bye, followed by a teary feeling when the train moved off; and on the way you were cross and tired (from too much candy, and too many parties at home), and very miserable at the dismal prospect of going back to lessons and rules, to fussy Miss Cripps and bothersome Helena Curtis, to Plain Mary Smith's endless stupidity and little Sarah's endless "May I come too?" But when Miss Dutton climbed on at the Junction, you felt a little better. When all the girls from the Chicago Special trooped after her, you suddenly remembered that you were awfully fond of some of them. When Margaret Lewis said, "Poor Cora Dennison isn't coming back to Fair Oaks. Her mother needs her, or her father has failed, or something,"—then you discover, quite unexpectedly, that you were a little bit glad to be traveling back to school with the crowd. And in Fair Oaks gym. that night after dinner, with a roaring fire to sit around, while you ate adorable

little cakes and drank black coffee (you hated coffee, only it seemed so "swell" and grown-up to be having it after dinner out of a silver urn),—why, by that time you were almost happy. And when Miss Marshall, sitting behind the coffee urn, in a becoming new dress, said, quite loudly but not so it sounded a bit like rules or orders, "Who thinks it would be fun for us to have a Twelfth Night Masque?"—why, then you were positively enthusiastic.

"It's just her clever way of getting us all to stop feeling homesick and stupid, and settle down to business," said Jane Learned to the girls near her.

Jane and Christina had returned to Fair Oaks twinnier, if possible, than ever. When their friends greeted them with "Hello, Jane-and-Christina," in token of their being now absolutely inseparable, the twins only laughed and liked it.

"No more quarrels for mine," Jane confided to Nancy.

"I couldn't have stood it one single minute longer," declared Christina, whose round face had recovered its accustomed look of rosy contentment.

"Yes," went on Jane, apropos of the Twelfth Night Masque, "Miss Marshall's a manager, she is! We've seen the after-Christmas lop-around-and-weep effect at other schools, and we know, don't we, Christina darling?"

"Well, anyway the Twelfth Night thing will be piles of fun," declared Christina placidly, leaving the complex study of underlying motives to her twin.

And Christina's conclusion was the popular one at Fair Oaks. It happened very opportunely that the Senior History Class was studying the "spacious times of Great Elizabeth," while the Senior Travel Class was supplementing the history lessons by tracing some of Elizabeth's progresses through her fair domain. The Juniors, under Miss Cripps, were struggling with allegory, as exemplified in "Pilgrim's Progress" and Milton's shorter poems, including the masque of "Comus"; the Second Year girls were deep in Shakespeare's comedies; while the First Year Sewing Class, just beginning, was loud in its demands for something interesting, like doll's clothes, to work on,—and what could be more interesting than costumes for a Twelfth Night Masque? As for the "Babies" like Sarah Williston, they enjoyed anything, as Jane remarked sagely, "if it had a long name and lots of mystery about it to make the poor kids stop thinking about home and mamma."

But Twelfth Night, it developed, when a committee of investigation, despatched by Miss Marshall to the school library, returned (running) with its report, was the evening before January sixth—

the merrymaking festival to usher in the solemn feast of Epiphany.

"So we can't do it," added the Chairman of the Investigators dejectedly. "Why, that's less than a week off, Miss Marshall!"

Everybody looked disappointed, and then Plain Mary Smith, to the surprise of all those present, including herself, had an idea.

"Don't you suppose Miss Marshall knew that when she suggested the party?" demanded Plain Mary, facing the investigators scornfully. "She wouldn't have started us off on a wild goose chase, would she? We can have the party when we get ready. If ordinary people don't know when Twelfth Night is, what does it matter about the exact date?"

Miss Marshall laughed at Plain Mary's downright logic, and then congratulated her on its soundness, advising the Investigating Committee not to be so easily discouraged next time.

A sigh of relief went up from the anxious girls.

"Now tell us what kind of a party it is, please, Miss Marshall," demanded Kittie Westervelt eagerly. "How do you celebrate Twelfth Night?"

Miss Marshall referred Kittie's question to the Investigating Committee, who explained blushingly that they had looked no further than the date.

"Oh, I did see something about a Bean King," put in Margaret Lewis, who had been one of the deputation to the encyclopædias. "They hid a bean in the Twelfth Night cake, and the one who got it was Bean King and sat on a throne, to preside over the Twelfth Night revels. Maybe that isn't quite accurate, Miss Marshall."

Miss Marshall smilingly but firmly refused to confirm or deny Margaret's account, or to add anything to it. "Suppose," she suggested, "that we give this committee another chance. Let us ask them to report to us here at this hour to-morrow evening, armed with all the information they can gather on their subject. As we have talked of having ours an Elizabethan Twelfth Night, I will ask the Senior History Class to be ready with appropriate suggestions. If the Sophomore English Class will offer us recommendations, based on their study of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night,' we shall be grateful. Oh, haven't you read that play yet? Well, I'm sure Miss Cripps will interrupt her regular plan of study to let you read it now, and to hurry the Juniors on to Milton's Masque. To begin with, we want all the facts we can get. Later we shall have to exercise our imaginations and our ingenuity in adapting the old customs to our own Twelfth Night Revels."

Jane Learned was unanimously elected chairman

of what she flippantly named the Imagination Committee, which had charge of the final plans for the wonderful Twelfth Night Revels. Vera Lawson had confidently expected to be chosen to "run" the Masque, but she forgave the insult to her dignity when the committee invited her to personate the Virgin Queen, in whose honor the Revels were supposed to be instituted by the Earl of Leicester (Billy Bray), at his castle of Kenilworth. The rest of the girls were divided into two groups: one to represent the Elizabethan lords and ladies, the other to present a motley company of Shakespearean characters. The lords and ladies were to dance stately minuets and pose in half-historic tableaux; there was to be a Fairy Frolic by the courtiers of King Oberon and Queen Titania; and the other Shakespearean characters were to appear in tableaux or short scenes from the plays. Midway in the festival the Twelfth Night cake was to be eaten, and then the Earl of Leicester would resign his proud seat beside the Queen's throne to the Bean King, who should conduct the remainder of the Revels according to his high pleasure.

"And I do hope no stick-in-the-mud gets the sacred bean," announced Jane inelegantly. "Imagine Plain Mary, for instance, conducting Revels! We'll just have to see to it that Revels, Part Two, is hilarious enough to run itself."

Jane's idea of Revels was, first and foremost, hilarity, with variety, odd combinations, and mysterious surprises to ensure it. Margaret Lewis's idea was to have things "right"; she spent every spare moment poring over books on costume and descriptions of seventeenth century castles. Kittie Westervelt's idea was to have things pretty. Kittie had a good eye for color, and her love of furbelows fitted in with the Elizabethan taste in dress. Even Jane had to admit that Kittie was a useful, if sometimes tiresome, member of the Imagination Committee.

But the presiding genius of the Masque was Miss Margery Dutton. Miss Dutton was fresh from college plays. She knew how to make anything out of anything else—a sword scabbard out of pasteboard and silver paper, wonderful "velvet" doublets out of canton flannel, fairy wings out of wire and tarleton or tissue paper, whichever was handier. She also knew about Morris dances and, as the regular dancing master had his hands full with the Fairy Frolic and the minuets, she drilled some Morris Dancers as the crowningly hilarious feature of Part Two. She also designed and made a wonderful robe for the Bean King to assume with his office; and she refused to show it even to Jane, which won her Jane's heartfelt admiration.

"So few people understand the value of mystery," Jane explained appreciatively. "Now Miss Cripps would have insisted that the Bean King should be chosen beforehand, so that he could rehearse the assuming of his royal robes."

Miss Cripps had charge of the scenes from Shakespeare's plays, and these were, accordingly, rehearsed with much precision and diligence; but the spirit of spontaneous enthusiasm that reigned at Fair Oaks was too strong for even Miss Cripps's methods to dampen.

"She didn't choose our scenes," explained Mildred Wallace. "Miss Dutton did that, and Miss Dutton has charge of the costumes. So of course we're going along all right."

Nancy Lee was a lord, in a slashed doublet of brown "velvet," embroidered in "thread of gold," Miss Dutton's tan riding-boots, laced and buckled with gold, and her own big brown hat adorned with a sweeping gold plume, no less magnificent for having been cut out of yellow tissue-paper fringe. In this costume she was to dance the minuet, with Kittie Westervelt, in a dainty white and gold dress, as her partner. At the last minute Christina, who was Puck, turned her ankle, and Nancy, being a prize-pupil in dancing, though not in algebra, was hastily instructed in the steps of the Fairy Frolic. She and Christina, who was too

lame to attempt even a minuet, were to change costumes at the intermission. Nancy was taller, but she was also slimmer; her doublet would not drag on Christina, and Puck's straight-hanging smock of moss green, with wings of shimmery green-gold gauze, fitted Nancy perfectly.

The day before the Masque was naturally a busy one for everybody. In the afternoon the decoration committee, hard at work transforming the prosaic gym. into a Castle Hall, called for volunteers to help make paper poppies. Then it was suddenly discovered that no one had any wire for stems.

"I'll go after it," Nancy offered promptly. She hated fussing with paper flowers.

"All right," returned Jane Learned. "Ask Miss Marshall's permission and come along with me. You can buy the wire while I see about—never you mind what. Then we'll be back here in a jiffy."

Miss Marshall gave her permission readily, and the girls hurried up-stairs to dress for outdoors.

Then Jane rushed back to the gym. to speak to somebody, and Nancy was crossing the dormitory hall alone, when Miss Marshall hurried out of her office to intercept her.

"Will you do an errand for me, Nancy?" she asked. "Sarah Williston has gone to Miss Hester's to try on a dress. Miss Dutton, who was to

have called for her at three, is very busy, and I have no one whom I can conveniently send in her place. Sarah will be waiting in the street doorway, Miss Dutton says, and as you are going to Frye's ——"

"We can stop for her as well as not, Miss Marshall," Nancy filled up the pause. "It will be just about three when we're through at Frye's, and of course we shall be glad to do it for you."

Jane was beckoning wildly, and the two girls hurried off.

"I've just got to tell you what I'm going for, Nancy Lee," Jane announced excitedly, as they went down the drive. "That new girl, Carlene Marbury—that entered after Christmas—the one with lots of red hair—well, she can dance the loveliest clog. She's going to dress like a gnome, —brown cambric smock, pointed cap, and so on,— and come in clogging at the end of the Fairy Frolic. And nobody knows it, not even Queen Titania."

"I can clog," announced Nancy, suiting the action to the word. Jane stared at her admiringly. "Why didn't you say so sooner? Well, come along now. You can't be a gnome, as well as Puck and Lord Somebody Something. I don't like that new redhead much, but she certainly can dance. Wish I was more fairy-like!"

Jane was in a frightful hurry, and, as is often the case when you are in a frightful hurry, things went all wrong. Frye's had no brown cambric for gnomes' costumes. Neither had Porter's. Nancy thought that grass-green was as gnome-like as earth-brown, but Jane disagreed and insisted upon pursuing brown down the length of Main Street. Nancy went for wire and found none fine enough. She misunderstood Jane's plan for meeting again, and the two girls waited for each other twenty minutes, finally met by accident, and were almost up and down the long hill that lay between Fair Oaks and the town's shops when Nancy remembered Sarah.

"I've got to go back," she declared tragically.

"Oh, she hasn't waited all this time," returned Jane crossly. "Why, it's long after four. She'll be back at Fair Oaks when we get there."

Nancy considered. "Maybe she will. She was going to wait in the street entrance. It's an awfully cold, windy day. I don't suppose she would wait out there more than a few minutes."

"Well, don't let's stand and freeze discussing it," said Jane. "Let's go on home and see if she's there."

"But if she isn't," objected Nancy, "think what a mess I'll be in with Miss Marshall."

Jane considered. "You wait at the gate, be-

BESIDE THE BIG SPRUCE

side the big spruce tree. I'll go ahead and signal my discoveries down to you. White handkerchief —Sarah is safe within; scarlet necktie—Sarah is not safe within. Then if you have to go back, you can go before Miss Marshall sees you around here."

"All right," agreed Nancy. "Only be sure, Jane, before you signal. And do hurry!"

In less than five minutes, which seemed hours to the anxious watcher under the big spruce, Jane's window flew up and the scarlet tie fluttered gaily out against the wind. With a gasp of dismay Nancy hastened at top speed back to Main Street and Miss Hester's dressmaking establishment. There, in the outer door of the building, stood Sarah Williston, gay in her red coat and scarlet furs, but with a pinched, tired look on her little white face. When Nancy explained and apologized, the child insisted that she hadn't been cold or frightened or impatient.

"I just thought Miss Dutton had forgotten me," she explained in her turn. "But if I went away, she might have remembered just then, and come for me, and worried for fear I was lost. So I stayed right still."

Nancy hurried her small charge home as fast as possible, and left her, apparently none the worse for her experience, in her own room. Afternoon

study hour was almost over. Nancy conscientiously devoted what remained to her hated algebra. While she dressed for dinner, Grace Allen, who was on the decorating committee, told her what they had done after Jane and Nancy left the gym. At the dinner table everybody talked Masque—and they all talked at once. Not until Nancy was eating her last mouthful of dessert did she remember Sarah Williston and look across the room to the Babies' table. Sarah's place was empty. Nancy wondered why,—and immediately the overwhelming, multifarious interests of the Masque absorbed her again.

In the corridor at evening recreation, she remembered Sarah once more, for somebody said, "Sarah Williston had a severe chill this afternoon. She's in the infirmary and they've sent for two doctors. She must be dreadfully sick."

"I ought to have spoken to Miss Marshall when we got back," Nancy reproached herself. "I'd better go now and tell her just what happened, and then I can find out how ill Sarah is."

But Miss Marshall was at the infirmary, so Miss Cripps, in charge of the school office in Miss Marshall's place, told Nancy. And Sarah was "threatened with pneumonia."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried Nancy.

Miss Cripps eyed her suspiciously. "Perhaps,"

she began, "you can tell us what Sarah did this afternoon to bring on this dreadful illness. You were with her, I believe."

Nancy reviewed the events of the afternoon in detail, conscious that, under Miss Cripps's cold scrutiny, she was making her own conduct seem absolutely inexcusable.

"Miss Lee," Miss Cripps began formally, when Nancy had finished, "you were careless in neglecting Miss Marshall's commission, and more thoughtless later, in not calling her attention to Sarah's chilled condition. I am only glad that you have now told us the truth. I shall lay the matter before Miss Marshall at her earliest convenience, and she will deal with you. Until she sends for you, Miss Lee, you will report in the larger study at all recreation hours, prepared to do extra problems in mathematics, which is, I believe, your weakest subject. For the remainder of this period you may go to your own room."

"Yes, Miss Cripps." Nancy's voice sounded choked and smothered with fright, grief, and anger combined. Little Sarah was dangerously ill. Miss Cripps treated her—Nancy Lee—as if she had meant to hide her carelessness—to deceive her about it, even.

"Of course I deserve to have Crippsy scold and take away my privileges," Nancy, waiting misera-

bly for bedtime, wrote in the red journal. "I deserve to have Miss Marshall tell me that she can't have an 'I-forgot girl' like me in her school. Why, if Sarah has pneumonia and dies, it will be all my fault. I shall be—I can't write it here. It's too dreadful a word to write down.

"P. S. Just the same Miss Cripps needn't have hinted that I meant to get out of telling what I did to Sarah."

Grace Allen came in at bedtime and knocked on Nancy's closed door. Nancy called through it that she was sleepy. Without another thought for the splendid Masque, she undressed miserably in the dark. But she could not go to sleep for more than an hour—which meant that Nancy Lee was as forlorn and unhappy and worried as she had ever been in all her short and merry life.

CHAPTER XIV

NANCY'S REBELLION

NEXT morning Sarah was better. It wasn't pneumonia—it was just a chill; and Dr. Mack wasn't coming any more. Miss Marshall had spent the night with the nurse in the infirmary, and was resting until lunch, not to be disturbed on any account. The Twelfth Night Masque was not to be postponed, as had been sadly rumored; and the whole afternoon was to be a special holiday. Nancy hovered anxiously outside the office door, hoping that Miss Cripps, who was presiding there, would call her in and remit, for this gala day, the penalties that she had perhaps thoughtlessly imposed. Instead Miss Cripps came out and asked Nancy why she was wasting her time loitering in the hallways, adding significantly that Miss Armitage would have charge of the small study that afternoon. Nancy failed miserably in algebra. She did not hear the question asked her in history. She sulked openly in English, and took some slight satisfaction in the discovery that she was making "Crippsy" nervous. In the afternoon, in the small study, with Miss Armitage

reading lessons in a monotonous undertone to Helena Curtis, who always worked just as usual on holidays, Nancy watched the door, first hopefully, then with tragic intensity, for a message from Miss Marshall. Surely she couldn't sleep all day. Surely she wouldn't keep any girl cooped up in the study all through a glorious holiday afternoon. And, oh, it couldn't be that she, or even relentless Miss Cripps, meant that Nancy should miss the Masque! Under her desk Nancy's feet tapped to the merry time of the Puck music, which she hummed "in her mind," while her eyes, misty with tears, were fixed unseeingly on the untouched extra algebra problems. At four Helena Curtis departed, thanking Miss Armitage volubly for her help. At quarter past Nancy found that winking hard was no use any more, and furtively wiped her eyes. At half-past Miss Armitage began picking up her books and papers.

"You may be excused now, Miss Lee," she said, with a reassuring smile.

"I haven't——" began Nancy, and stopped suddenly, perceiving that Miss Armitage, who was new at the school since Christmas, had providentially forgotten to ask for the algebra problems. "I haven't been sent for by Miss Marshall, I suppose?" she concluded hastily.

Miss Armitage shook her head. "My instruc-

tions were only to let you go at four-thirty," she said. "So run along and have all the fun you can before dinner."

"Yes, thank you," said Nancy, and ran.

Up on the third floor everything was in a delicious tumult of holiday confusion,—fancy dress, impromptu dances in the corridors, frenzied last rehearsals in quiet corners, pandemonium everywhere.

"Hello, you poor abused infant!" called out Jane from the door of the Unmixed Study. "Escaped at last, have you? And what is the final verdict of the Highest Power?"

Nancy explained that she hadn't yet been sent for by the Highest Power, and then propounded the terrible uncertainty that hung over her evening. "She couldn't mean me to miss the Masque, could she, Jane? She must have just forgotten to send for me, mustn't she?"

"Sure she must," agreed Jane cheerfully. "I say, Nancy, the bean will be in a piece of cake with a bulge in the frosting. I've arranged it with the cook. Angle for it, will you? And pass the word along to all the other live wires. We mustn't have a stick-in-the-mud for Bean King."

"But if she doesn't send ——" Nancy returned anxiously to the main issue.

"Oh, she will," Jane assured her glibly. "The afternoon is yet young, my child. Christina wants to try on your lordly boots. Bring 'em over, will you?"

Nancy brought the boots, but she did not wait while Christina tried them on. The irresponsible gaiety that always pervaded the twins' apartments jarred on her mood of depression and uncertainty. Just at present she found gloomy Grace Allen a more congenial companion. Being naturally a pessimist, Grace differed from Jane in being sure that Miss Marshall would not send for Nancy before dinner.

"They say Sarah is still very ill," she declared dubiously, "and of course Miss Marshall is awfully worried and tired. She won't have time for any extras. But all the same she wouldn't mean to spoil your fun to-night," added Grace with decision. "And I certainly shouldn't stay down in that horrid study doing algebra, just to please Miss Cripps. I'm sure of that."

"So am I. I certainly shan't stay down there," agreed Nancy rebelliously. "I'm going to the Masque, whatever happens. Of course I am! But I wish—it would be horrid to have Miss Cripps hunt me up and send me away from the party in disgrace. I wish this was a masked Masque, like the Hallowe'en party."

"Well, it's not," said Grace irritably. She was fairly bursting with indignation over her adored Nancy's predicament; but being jealous because Jane had been consulted first, she merely appeared more than ordinarily indifferent and unsympathetic.

There was a gloomy silence.

"I know one thing you might do," Grace suggested coldly at last. "You might change costumes with me. Wigs and hats are a fairly good disguise. If Miss Cripps comes to find you, she will try to pick you out by your costume. She has a list of them all. If you were in my black and red things, I believe it would put her off the scent."

Nancy considered. "It might. But she'd find me after intermission, when I come on as Puck. That's down on the list of parts too, I suppose." Nancy thought again, frowning. "Wait a minute," she ordered, and ran over to consult resourceful Jane.

In five minutes it was all arranged. Jane burrowed under her bed and produced ten masks, left over from Hallowe'en, which, for mysterious reasons of her own, she had been hoarding. So ten girls,—including Nancy, of course,—should go to the party masked. Grace Allen and Nancy should exchange lords' costumes, and partners for the

minuet. The new red-haired girl, Carlene Marbury, should be Puck,—she knew the steps,—and Nancy should be the mysterious brown-clad gnome who came in clogging, to the amazement of the fairy court, at the end of the fairy spectacle. Jane was enthusiastic over the changes. They would make everybody "sit up and take notice," she said. Christina objected a little, because Grace's black and red costume wouldn't go well with Nancy's hair, or hers either.

But Jane silenced her twin with a gay, "Who cares about looks? It's larks we're after. What could be better than a last-minute swap-around like this? I say, Nancy, I think we'd better change a few parts more while we're at it. I'll go and ask Helena Curtis, who's as tall and anti-fairy-like as yours truly, to swap togs with me. And I'll try to arrange a few more pairs."

Grace flushed angrily when Nancy explained how Jane Learned had taken possession of her idea and developed it; but she did not suggest backing out of her part in the scheme. As for Nancy, she appeared to be tremendously enthusiastic about the plan.

"If Crippsy doesn't come to look for me, it will be fun enough," she declared,—"surprising the whole school with our masks. And if she does come and can't find me, it will be simply perfect!

Of course——" Nancy stopped short, deciding that it was better not to think or talk about the inevitable settlement with Miss Cripps and Miss Marshall. And just at that moment matters took a sudden turn ; Miss Marshall's special maid Mary Ann appeared in the open door.

"She wants yer." Mary Ann nodded affably at Nancy. "The little girl's better again, and she's havin' her tea like a Christian, poor dear lady, and she wants ter see yer."

"All right, Mary Ann. Please say that I'll be there in a minute. I've got to get back into my dress," explained Nancy, who had been trying on Grace's costume.

But when, after a hardly perceptible delay, Nancy knocked on Miss Marshall's study door, she was admitted by a disgruntled Mary Ann, engaged in clearing away an untouched tea service.

"Doctor's came," explained Mary Ann shortly, "and she's went to the 'firmary with him. No tea wanted. You're to wait, though."

Mary Ann turned on the lights,—for it was growing dusk,—picked up the tea tray, and departed, grumbling loudly about "them keerless doctors always turnin' up unexpected at meal times." Nancy examined the bric-à-brac, counted the flowers on the wall-paper, and, with soft steps and an anxious eye on the door, practiced all the

varieties of clog she knew. Then she sat down to wait. And the longer she waited the more frightened she grew about little Sarah—which was reasonable—and the more angry with Miss Cripps—which was not at all reasonable, though natural, perhaps, under the circumstances. When the dressing bell rang Nancy stood up to go, and then sat down again suddenly. She had worried a good deal about the chance of encountering Miss Cripps at dinner and being definitely forbidden the party; now she could avoid that. She would wait in Miss Marshall's study until it was too late to dress—the Masque costumes were to be worn at dinner. Then she would slip up-stairs, array herself as a lord, and join the rest of the Masquers as they trooped over to the gym. Grace or Jane would come for her, and perhaps Mary Ann could be persuaded that it was her duty to send Nancy's dinner up—because that horrid doctor had kept Miss Marshall from her appointment. If not, Nancy would have to go hungry till the Bean Feast—which wouldn't have been so bad if everything had not begun, about that time, to go all wrong.

The First Annual Twelfth Night Masque at Fair Oaks School for Girls—Jane insisted upon the full title with capitals—was a highly successful, though somewhat confused festivity. The ten conspirators—fortunately no change of costume had been

noticed by the Powers at dinner—dropped to the tail of the procession from Fair Oaks dining-room to the Great Hall of Kenilworth Castle, then hastily assumed their masks, hitherto concealed about their persons, and burst, a motley, shouting, riotous crew, upon the view of their astonished comrades. The minuet music was even then striking up—Jane had insisted that events move rapidly—and Kittie Westervelt, seizing her partner, the Lord in brown and gold, and eagerly demanding what the masks meant as she hurried him to their place, was staggered by being ordered, in a voice that was certainly not Nancy Lee's, to keep still or she would spoil everything.

"You're spoiling everything right now," retorted Kittie angrily, as the Lord in brown tripped awkwardly over her train and tore it.

"You ought to hold your dress up," muttered the Lord. "Wish I'd kept my own things. These boots ——"

Jane, as Bottom the Weaver, had suddenly remembered that Malvolio, whom she had "swapped" to Helena Curtis, had to appear in a tableau. She was making frantic efforts to explain to Helena about the pose.

"Bottom is in a tableau, too," explained Helena in her turn, "and this mask bothers my eyes. Come down to my locker and change back, Jane."

"No time," cried Jane wildly, watching the minuet. A Lord in red and black had to act as the leader of one line in a sort of march at the end of the dance. He had gone through it perfectly at rehearsal, but now things were getting sadly mixed.

"Who cares if it's all a bit wild?" cried Jane gaily. "It's also exciting. Excitement, my dear Malvolio, is the staff of life."

"Miss Cripps will be mad if the tableaux aren't exactly right," returned Helena without enthusiasm.

"Don't you ever tell her that you swapped parts," threatened Jane darkly, "or we won't ask you to be in any of our doings again. Remember!"

Of course Malvolio, in dread of revealing his identity, made a sad mess of the Twelfth Night tableau. And Plain Mary Smith, of all people, got the Bean. The Lord in red and black did not have even a chance to "angle" for it, because the earth-brown Gnome's costume had been mislaid, through a stupid misunderstanding between Carlene Marbury and Jane, and had to be hunted for frantically all through the Bean King's feast. The Lord in red and black, having missed dinner, was too cross, as well as too tired and hungry, when the earth-brown smock and cap finally

turned up and had been hastily adjusted, to clog with much spirit. Still the impromptu feature was a great success. Nobody could recognize the earth-brown Gnome, because his cap was over his eyes and his face was heavily painted. He disappeared immediately after the dance, along with the Lord in black and red. So most people guessed that Jane was the Lord and Christina the Gnome, and that, having danced too soon on her weak ankle, the small twin had been obliged to retire early from the revels, and the tall one had gone too, for company.

But when Jane, dressed as Bottom, was discovered unmasked and very red in the face, talking earnestly to Miss Cripps near the gym. door, this popular theory was exploded.

After her talk with Miss Cripps, Jane went around and collected nine masks, while Miss Cripps stood waiting for her. The tenth mask was not on hand for collection—a fact which mystified Jane quite as much as it did any one else. And neither the Gnome nor the Lord in red and black appeared in the final March of Triumph, led by the beautiful Queen of the Revels,—who was rather scornful about taking the awkward, dumpy Bean King's arm. The stately Earl of Leicester, walking between the King and Queen of Fairy-land, brought up the rear of the procession, which was

mad and merry and hilarious enough to please even the critical taste of the chairman of the Imagination Committee. And Margaret Lewis knew it was "right," and Kittie Westervelt thrilled to its prettiness. And little Miss Dutton, up in the gallery, thought, with a homesick sigh, that it was just like college, and resolved to get that clever Jane Learned and Margaret Lewis, with the fine eyes and the wonderful poise of manner, interested in her Alma Mater at her earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER XV

STRAIGHTENING THINGS OUT

As the jigging music of the clog-dance died away into an odd little elfish chord, it was easy enough for an earth-brown Gnome, who, as Jane was explaining loudly, must be Carlene Marbury, to slip furtively into the shadows behind the Queen's throne, and from there to dash out by a side door and run through the underground passage back to the deserted dormitory. And there was nobody there to see the earth-brown Gnome climb stealthily to the third-floor corridor, and disappear into the study occupied jointly by Nancy Lee and Grace Allen.

The Gnome dropped breathlessly into Nancy's big chair by the table, and his grotesquely-painted face was immediately buried on the padded arm of the big chair. Poor Gnome!

It had been horrid,—horrid—horrid! It wasn't that Vera Lawson said that Nancy had spoiled the whole minuet. It wasn't that Miss Cripps had stayed around every minute and made her dreadfully uncomfortable. It wasn't even that Margaret

Lewis had said a mean thing—true, too, maybe —about playing fair with the teachers. It was just that everything was hateful—hateful—hateful—and that —— Oh, you couldn't say it. You could only cry it out,—the paint on your face all mixed up with the tears, staining your earth-brown sleeve,—alone, by yourself, in the dark. And after that the only thing left to do was to go to bed with "a fearful headache"—Nancy had one sure enough by that time. Then nobody would ever know that you had been such a cry-baby. They would all think you had had a perfectly glorious time,—as enthusiastic Kittie Westervelt had put it,—bothering Crippsy, and getting everybody excited about the masks and the Gnome's identity.

"A perfectly glorious time!" repeated Nancy scornfully at last, having had her cry out and come to the point of wanting to think things over. "A nice mess I've made for myself!" She turned on a light, and stared dazedly at her rainbow-colored sleeve, and then, in the mirror, at her bleared, tear-washed, paint-streaked face. "A nice manager I am! Of course I ought to have had my dinner with the others, and then gone back to find Miss Marshall. She couldn't have blamed me so dreadfully much for forgetting Sarah. Forgetting to explain about her having been out in the cold was a lot worse. But I honestly did forget. I

wasn't trying to get out of things then, or afterward; and Miss Marshall isn't the kind to suspect me of what I didn't do. Why, if I'd only waited to see her, I probably could have settled everything all up, and gone to the Masque, and enjoyed myself, instead of sneaking in ——" Nancy's lip quivered again, and her gray eyes filled with tears.

"But now, the awful mess I'm in! Suppose Miss Cripps did say that I was to report at the study until Miss Marshall sent for me. Of course she meant until Miss Marshall saw me, and let me off. I've disobeyed Miss Cripps—there's no way out of that—and I've disobeyed Miss Marshall, by going off when I should either have waited or left word. Miss Marshall has every reason now to think that I'm not to be trusted about anything."

Nancy stared gloomily at her parti-colored sleeve.

"Maybe I shall be sent home," she decided gloomily. "Somebody told me that Sarah is worse again. Oh, dear! I just can't wait till morning to know whether she is—and what's to happen to me—and—everything. I wonder if I dare ——"

There was a bang and a shriek in the hall outside. The Masque was over, and Jane Learned was taking off her boots, which pinched, as she came down the corridor.

"Oh, Nancy Lee!" she trilled outside Nancy's door. Nancy tiptoed hastily to her wash-stand, called "Come in!" and was discovered washing off paint vigorously.

"Got a horrid headache!" she sputtered behind the wash-cloth. "That hot mask,—and Grace's coat was too tight. And I didn't have any dinner, or any eats at the Bean Feast, either. So I came off early."

"You departed just in time, my child." Jane explained about Miss Cripps and the masks. "I thought you must have had a tip. As it was, she didn't find out a thing. Carlene Marbury, being new and not used to Crippsy's little ways, got cornered and had to divulge that she played Puck. But that didn't enlighten Crippsy any, because luckily Christina was down for Puck on the official list. Of course Crippsy suspects us Terrible Twins,—she'd be bound to anyway—but she'll have to work her poor old brain overtime to prove anything against us. If you manage right, Nancy Lee, and don't forget that all Crippsy's orders ceased when Miss Marshall sent for you, you can come out of this with a good one on Crippsy and nothing at all on you. Too bad you missed the Triumphal Procession. It was lovely and riotous."

"Jane," demanded Nancy suddenly, "did you hear that Sarah is worse again?"

"I CAME OFF EARLY"

"No," said Jane, "I didn't. I heard that she cried because she had to miss being the Fairy Pease-Blossom to-night. My experience is that when you begin to cry about missing things, you're jolly well getting better. I say, Nancy, try vaseline on that paint. Water's no good."

Nancy, rubbing her face dry, surveyed it anxiously. "I will later," she said. "Hunt up my blue kimono, please, Jane. It's somewhere in the closet. You don't suppose Miss Marshall's gone to bed yet, do you?"

"Without supposing anything," called Jane from the depths of the closet, "I happen to know that she hasn't, because I saw her at her desk writing, as we came past her door. So if you're starved enough to contemplate more desperate deeds, like raiding the pantry, you'd better wait a while."

"Thanks." Nancy, who had been smoothing her rumpled hair, put on the kimono. "I'm going down to see Miss Marshall," she announced composedly.

Jane stared blankly. "What for?" she demanded at last.

"Why, to tell her all about everything," explained Nancy comprehensively. "I had a horrid time to-night, Jane—lots horrider than algebra in the study would have been. Since I came up

here, I've been thinking. Now I just can't wait till morning to straighten things out."

Jane looked helplessly about her, as if for support in this astonishing contingency ; and finally sat down, with careful deliberation, on the edge of Nancy's cot. "Great hat!" she said at last. "Great hat, Nancy Lee! You're going to 'tell her all about everything' after the trouble we've taken to hide our tracks! You're going to straighten things out, when we've worked so hard to muddle 'em up! Great hat doesn't half express my feelings."

"I suppose," said Nancy, flushing a little in the face of Jane's scornful amazement, "I suppose you think I'm a regular prig—to go and own up."

Jane continued to stare at her as if she were some curious, inexplicable phenomenon.

"No," she said at last, "I can't think you're a prig, Nancy Lee, because, you see, I know you're not one. You're no more a prig than Hester Low, —last year's Triangler,—was a prig. Hester could get into scrapes just like magic,—but she couldn't ever get out any way at all. I always had to pull her out. But that doesn't really prove anything, when you come to think of it, except that Hester was the kind of girl that loses her head when she needs it most." Jane paused to consider the matter further. "Why shouldn't girls act sensible at

boarding-school as well as at other places? Boarding-school scrapes are generally fearfully silly—this one was. You wouldn't think of doing such silly things anywhere else. I suppose it's being with so many other girls, for one thing; and then silly teachers, like Crippsy, have a lot to do with it. But Miss Marshall is all right. She understands things every time. The more I think about your idea, the better I like it, Nancy. It's no prig's idea, anyhow. So run along, child, and see how you come out."

The corridor lights were still burning; even Miss Cripps expected to give a Twelfth Night Masque a little extra time to quiet down in. Nancy's gray eyes were big and bright with the excitement of her queer adventure. Her cheeks were flushed with hard scrubbing and the remains of red paint. Her hastily brushed hair stood out in bewitching little yellow curls around her face. Her blue kimono, held carefully together to hide the disheveled brown smock, was as becoming a garment as any in Nancy's voluminous wardrobe. But Nancy was not thinking about how she looked, as she ran down-stairs, halted for a moment in Miss Marshall's door to ask, "May I come in, please?" and then, impulsively taking permission for granted, faced her startled hostess across the study with a perfectly serious, if not very in-

telligible, "To straighten things out right away, I mean, please, Miss Marshall."

After her first start of surprise, Miss Marshall wanted desperately to smile at her pretty visitor's evident agitation; but she stifled the impulse.

"Close the door, please," she ordered coolly. "Then tell me exactly why you are here, out of hours."

Nancy closed the door—it took forever, because her hand shook so—and then came and stood close beside Miss Marshall's desk.

"I'm here because everything is in such a mess," she explained in a swift rush of words. "Because I've been the most dreadful I-forgot girl lately that ever was in this world. And I'm here now, out of hours, because I got to thinking things over, and it seemed as if every minute while I didn't explain made them lots worse and so—I came. Besides, I suppose I wanted to know what's to become of me. Probably you're going to send me home." Nancy paused, gulping miserably.

"Sit down—Nancy."

Nancy sank limply into a chair. "That's another awful thing," she went on sadly. "You promised to call me Nancy, and I promised to try to think first. And for the past two days I've thought last—or not thought at all—worse than

I ever did in all my life. Oh, Miss Marshall, is Sarah going to die?"

Miss Marshall gave a long tired sigh. "No," she said, "Sarah is going to be all right now. About to-morrow afternoon she'll be ready for fairy stories. Can I depend on you ——"

"Rather!" cried Nancy joyously. "I mean, yes, Miss Marshall, you certainly can. It's splendid of you to let me do anything for you again."

Miss Marshall had no enthusiasm with which to match Nancy's. "Perhaps," she said in that cold, distant voice that was so unpleasant, "perhaps you think that I shouldn't have depended on you so much the other afternoon—that I shouldn't have trusted you to bring Sarah home."

"Oh, Miss Marshall!" Nancy's eyes were wide with indignation. "As if I oughtn't to be capable of being trusted with an easy little errand like that! And of course, after I wasn't capable of being trusted with it, I ought to have come and told you so right away."

"It would have saved a great deal of trouble and worry if you had thought of that at the time, Nancy."

"But I wasn't trying to sneak out of telling," Nancy hurried on. "I just—didn't think."

"Anything else to straighten out, Nancy?"

Nancy blushed. "Yes, Miss Marshall, a lot of silliness to-day. I've got to apologize to Miss Cripps about that part," she ended sadly, when she had explained how her mad desire to go to the Masque had run away with every bit of her good sense. "I don't know what else is going to happen to me, but I'm sure I've got to apologize. But would you tell Miss Cripps, when you have a chance, Miss Marshall, that I honestly wasn't trying to sneak out of anything—that I came here myself and told you just how everything was."

Miss Marshall smiled very, very faintly. "Until we have settled the main issue, suppose we keep strictly to that, Nancy."

"Oh, yes, Miss Marshall," gasped Nancy. "Only —what is it, please? Oh, of course it's about my being such a careless person."

"Well?"

Nancy gasped again. "I—I—don't understand what you want me to say, Miss Marshall."

"I want you to say what's to be done about you."

Nancy's gray eyes opened wide, this time with astonishment. "You—want—me ——" she began. And then, all at once Nancy's serious, intent expression changed, the dimple in her chin asserted itself, and her face crinkled suddenly into what Brother Dick called "Nancy's all-over grin,"

which presently exploded into an amused little gurgle. "You want me," she repeated, "to tell you what to do about me. How—how funny, Miss Marshall!"

"Is it?" asked Miss Marshall, in a tone so icily cold and sharply cutting that Nancy's all-over smile vanished as swiftly as if it had never been.

There was a long, dreadful pause, while Nancy's troubled eyes searched Miss Marshall's face for an answer to her perplexing question.

Somehow she finally found it. "You mean," she said at last, "that if I'm a bothersome person to have around, it's my business to think how to stop it, instead of making other people—you, for instance—spend their time doing it."

"Exactly," said Miss Marshall, with a sudden friendly light in her tired eyes. "That's not so funny, is it? When you understand, it's really very sensible."

Nancy nodded vigorously. "Well," she began, anxious to do her duty promptly, now that it had been pointed out to her, "I honestly don't think it would be any use to send me home. Mother is awfully busy, and father is awfully absent-minded; and being the youngest, I guess I've been sort of spoiled at home. The last thing mother said to me before I came here,—and she said it again at Christmas time—was that I was to try above all

things to learn to be less careless and more orderly at school. So I guess she's sort of given me up," ended Nancy despondently.

"Well, I haven't given you up—not yet," said Miss Marshall.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Nancy eagerly, and hastily returned to the main issue. "Of course you might have me go and stand in that doorway as long as Sarah did, to see how it seemed. But then"—Nancy dimpled—"I should probably catch a cold too, and have to go to the infirmary, and worry you some more, maybe. And when I got well, I don't believe I should remember things much better."

Nancy paused. "It's awful to think of just the right thing, isn't it? Of course there's missing recreations and having French exercises to copy or poetry to learn. But I never could see that that sort of thing did much except to make you hate French and poetry. And if I missed as many recreations as I probably deserve to, I'm afraid I should ruin my health."

"It's very little use," Miss Marshall broke in suddenly upon Nancy's contented, rambling monologue, "to talk over any serious matter such as this on the spur of the moment. I understand that you are ready to assume the responsibility of finding a possible remedy for your carelessness."

"Yes," said Nancy, in a subdued voice.

"Very well. When you are ready to report—by that I mean when you have thought over all sides of the matter, and decided, to the very best of your ability, upon some definite plan that may impress upon you all the pain and trouble you have caused this week, and keep you from causing more in the future—when you are ready with such a report,—concise, definite, and to the point,—you may come to me and deliver it."

"Yes, Miss Marshall."

"Good-night, Nancy."

There were dozens of questions that Nancy wanted to ask,—especially whether or not she might come back later that evening, if her report was ready. But there was something very definite and final in the sound of Miss Marshall's good-night. It sent Nancy up-stairs feeling very small and inefficient and heavily weighed down with the necessity of being "concise, definite and to the point." If she couldn't be all that, she must just wait till she could be. And Nancy abhorred waiting!

"Plan work all right?" Jane stuck her head out of the Unmixed Study door.

"I guess so," Nancy told her doubtfully. "I—please may I borrow your dictionary, Jane? I want to look up a word."

"Sure, you may borrow it." Jane handed out the dictionary and disappeared, tactfully silent about the working of Nancy's plan.

"Just the same, it ought to have worked," she informed Christina severely. "That's the trouble with splendid plans. You never can tell whether they'll seem splendid to other people. Queer little things you haven't thought about pop up and spoil everything." Jane yawned prodigiously and the next minute was fast asleep.

And Nancy, having laboriously ascertained the exact meaning of concise, and kept awake as long as possible, trying vainly to dispose of her perplexing problem before she slept, followed Jane's example.

CHAPTER XVI

NANCY'S PENANCE

For the next two days Nancy Lee was a very trying person to live with—quite as bad as Grace Allen in one of her very worst moods. She woke up, the morning after the Masque, with a vague, uncomfortable feeling that something horrid had happened to her. In a few minutes she remembered what it was, and not even the glorious winter sunshine outside her window or the joyous rumor, drifting up to the third-floor corridor by way of the cook and Mary Ann from Thomas the gardener, to the effect that the ice on the lake was at last strong enough for skating, could make life look one bit brighter for Nancy Lee.

"I probably shan't have time to go skating this afternoon," she told Kittie Westervelt shortly, when Kittie wished to "engage her" as partner for the afternoon sports. "I have—at least—I may have something else to see to."

Surely it couldn't take longer than the whole morning—recitation periods subtracted—to think out anything! And the very minute she had

thought, Nancy intended to see Miss Marshall and finish matters up with a rush.

Breakfast brought fresh trials. The sight of Miss Cripps, stern and forbidding, at the head of the senior table, reminded Nancy that it would only make a bad matter very much worse to put off the apology; and the interview involved was perfectly certain to be disagreeable. Then the Masque was of course the chief topic of conversation; and Nancy discovered, to her deep annoyance, that all the girls knew how she had gone to it without permission, and was now in a fearful scrape, as consequence. Nancy hated to be conspicuous. She hated even more to be pitied. Most annoying of all was the way some of the girls—the silliest ones—insisted upon admiring her and setting her up as a sort of heroine because she had recklessly evaded Miss Cripps's orders. Nancy quarreled with Kittie and two of the Fashion Plates on this point. She deeply offended Grace Allen and Christina Learned by refusing to tell them anything about her interview with Miss Marshall. She imagined that Margaret Lewis was looking sympathetically at her, and very rudely asked her to stop. But Margaret explained so pleasantly that she was only looking sad because her skate-strap was broken, that poor, worried Nancy thawed in her turn, and admitted that she was cross and

nervous because she was trying so hard "to think."

"I believe I just hate to think," she announced hotly. "I can't get anywhere. My mind just runs around in a circle."

Margaret laughed. "Writing things down always helps me to keep my brains on the straight track," she suggested. "For instance, in algebra, when I don't know how to start on a problem——"

"Oh, this isn't algebra," Nancy informed her. "It's fifty times worse. It's about what a person ought to do."

"Well, that's certainly a problem," insisted Margaret, "if it isn't algebra. I believe it would help to state it clearly in writing."

So that afternoon, Nancy having accomplished her required exercise as speedily as possible in the gym.—she had no time or heart for skating,—hurried back to her room, and wrote down her problem thus:

"X = what to do to make me think before I act.

"Y = how to make up to Sarah for missing the party and being sick.

"Z = how to make up to Miss Marshall for having worried and sat up nights.

"Thank goodness, Miss Cripps is settled," sighed Nancy, when she had finished the statement of *z*.

"Three unknown quantities are quite enough for me. Oh, I wonder if Miss Marshall expects me to go and find out about telling those stories to Sarah, or wait till I'm sent for. I suppose I'd better ask."

Miss Marshall seemed to have assumed, as a matter of course, that Nancy would remember her engagement and take the initiative about fulfilling it; and Nancy accordingly hurried off to the infirmary, armed with the Princess's love for Sarah, which had come to her through a chance meeting between Mrs. Barton and Vera Lawson, and which made a splendid opening for fairy-tales. For half an hour Nancy sat beside little Sarah's bed, patiently inventing wonderful adventures for the Enchanted Princess and her magically disguised Prince Charming. Then, noticing that her small listener had stopped asking questions and lay back listlessly on her pillows, Nancy brought the adventures to an exciting finish, and departed with a reassuring promise of more stories, "as soon as she could make some up."

On the way up-stairs Nancy stopped again at Miss Marshall's door. "There's a thing I've thought of," she began sedately. "Not the concise report on the main issue, but a thing that ought to be seen to right away. Vera Lawson met the Princess to-day—I mean she met Mrs. Barton,

but Sarah and I call her the Princess. Mrs. Barton asked about Sarah and Vera told her that Sarah was dangerously ill—she hadn't heard how much better Sarah is now. And Mrs. Barton will worry a lot about that, Miss Marshall, because she's just dreadfully fond of Sarah; and worrying will make her think about Alice, and that's just what she mustn't do, you know. So I thought if you'd send some girl to see her and explain ——" Nancy hesitated, blushing. "I don't deserve to have a chance to go, but it would be splendid if you sent Lloyd Mallory. The Princess would like Lloyd—she likes all girls, I guess, Miss Marshall,—and Lloyd couldn't help adoring the Princess. She hasn't very many friends here at school, and I think she'd like the fun of going," concluded Nancy hastily.

"Thank you, Nancy. Your suggestion is excellent, and I shall see that it is carried out at once."

Now at this point Nancy had intended to say, "I have thought and thought, and I can't ever make that concise report, Miss Marshall."

But something in Miss Marshall's crisp, matter-of-fact acceptance of her plan about Lloyd and the Princess—as if she expected ideas that were worth attending to from Nancy Lee—made Nancy ashamed to admit so soon that she was beaten. Of course she was beaten—stating a problem isn't

solving it—but she wouldn't tell Miss Marshall so just yet.

And then, while she was idling about her study, waiting for the dinner gong, Nancy had a thought. During dinner the thought grew like a Japanese magic flower or the proverbial mushroom. The talk at Nancy's table was all about skating. Thomas the gardener thought that they ought to have their annual Ice Carnival next week; it wouldn't do to delay until a January thaw came on. Nancy had another thought about that—a sad but useful thought. This settled x and y, but the answer to x wasn't concise, and z still had no answer at all. For another long day Nancy was distrait and irritable. And when, at evening recreation, she rushed down to Miss Marshall, with her report, "concise, definite, and to the point," neatly written out in terms of algebraic symbols, Miss Dutton and Miss Armitage were in the study; and Miss Marshall, who was cooking something in her beautiful copper chafing-dish, told Nancy, over her shoulder, to come back in morning office-hours.

By that time, of course, the beautiful report, over the making of which Nancy had fairly glowed with pride, appeared no longer beautiful, but very silly and inadequate. And finally at the critical moment Nancy mislaid it in her history

note-book, and was obliged to reproduce it orally from memory—which was, after all, perhaps, the best way.

"Well?" said Miss Marshall sharply, when Nancy appeared to keep her appointment. She looked dreadfully stern and forbidding. Nancy explained, in a shaky little voice, about *x*, *y*, and *z*.

"Well?" repeated Miss Marshall relentlessly.

Nancy gave a little gasp, threw conciseness, definiteness, and point to the winds, and plunged in.

"I haven't thought of much," she began apologetically. "First I thought of a party for Sarah, because you see she missed this one, and she'd looked forward to it so, and—and—we'd teased her a lot about being little and really believing in fairies, and not knowing any history. So I thought that if I planned her a party that she'd like and understand all about—only the other girls would have to like it too, because if they didn't Sarah would be hurt and disappointed—I thought that maybe thinking up such a hard kind of a party and getting everybody interested and all would—would worry me quite a lot, and get me into the habit of planning and thinking better."

"Yes." There was a queer questioning note in

Miss Marshall's "yes" that made Nancy feel about six times as unhappy and ill at ease as she had before.

"Of course I shouldn't expect to go to the party," she added hastily, with a violent blush. "I should expect to plan it and then stay away. And—I haven't skated any yet, Miss Marshall. I just love skating, and so I think I ought to have to give it up for ——" Nancy glanced appealingly at Miss Marshall's face. "For all winter," she ended swiftly, bound at all costs to make Miss Marshall believe that she had tried to "think fair." "I guess that giving up skating and the Ice Carnival ——" Nancy sighed a despairing sigh, and turned hastily to *z*. "I couldn't think of any way to make up to you, Miss Marshall, except to do my best to try to improve. And that doesn't count, because of course I ought to have done it anyway."

All of a sudden Miss Marshall's cold, quizzical expression broke into a friendly smile. "You've made up to me already, Nancy, by taking hold of this matter as you have. You've had some good practice in hard thinking already, and you will get more over Sarah's party. Let me know when you have that definitely planned. Nothing more now, I think, Nancy, except to wish you the best of success."

Up-stairs Grace was dressing for gym. Nancy hastened to do likewise, for they were in the same division.

"The Ice Carnival is to be next Monday," Grace called across the study, "because there's a full moon that night."

"I can't go," Nancy called back, glad to get the unpleasant disclosure over with.

"You poor thing!" sympathized Grace, when Nancy had explained. "You've looked forward so to the skating!"

Nancy laughed. "Rushed out every morning before breakfast to see if the ice was thick enough. And now I can't cut a single figure eight on it."

"How did Miss Marshall know that you liked skating so much?" demanded Grace curiously.

"I told her." Rather crossly, Nancy explained about the self-imposed penances.

"I think you were silly," declared Grace. "You might just as well have given up something you didn't care so much about."

Nancy stared. "I'd rather give up skating forever than not play fair when I'm being trusted," she declared. "Besides, I honestly want to give myself the best chance I can to amount to something in this world. Looking out at that ice every single morning when I close my window, and every time I go across the campus, and every

afternoon when I have to go off on a stupid walk instead of going skating,—all that's going to make me think a good many long thoughts, Grace Allen. And suppose little Sarah had died!"

That night she wrote it all down in the red journal. "I did hope awfully," confessed honest Nancy, "that she'd suggest for me to give up skating for a week. That was why I waited so long before I said for all winter. But I guess she knows me pretty well. I guess she thinks that it will take all winter, and maybe several winters, to make me over into something besides a dreadfully careless girl.

"N. B. My top drawer is a mess this minute, in spite of everything, but I'm going to see to it the first chance I get."

CHAPTER XVII

LLOYD MALLORY'S CHANCE

LLOYD MALLORY made her first visit to the Enchanted Princess very reluctantly, going only because on the whole it was easier to face unknown terrors than to tell Miss Marshall, of whom she stood dreadfully in awe, why she did not wish to carry a simple message to the gray house on the hill.

She found the Princess in the cozy sitting-room that overlooked the Fair Oaks campus, staring somberly out at the lake, which was alive with graceful, swiftly-moving skates.

"They're having such a good time down there," she said wistfully to Lloyd.

"Yes," agreed Lloyd, and then something in the little Princess's plaintive sadness opened the girl's lonely heart. "They've all got lots of friends," she added. "You can always have fun enough if you have friends."

The little Princess smiled at her brightly. "Oh, yes! And girls always make friends with everybody. Why, my little girl ——" she paused

suddenly. "I guess I mustn't think about that. But—gay young girls never need worry about making friends. It's always easy enough for them."

"It isn't easy at all for me," Lloyd confessed. "It seems I don't know how to make any."

The little Princess glanced curiously at her visitor. "Don't you want to see my flowers?" she asked abruptly, and led the way into the great conservatory, a bower of palms and ferns and climbing roses, with marguerites and scarlet geraniums in one bay window and a great bed of pansies in the other.

Lloyd's shy face lit with pleasure when she noticed the pansies. "I never saw so many of them together!" she cried eagerly.

"Oh, you love them best, too!" said the Princess softly. "How nice! That's just like my little girl. She used to say they were like people, with their funny, bright little faces. When she was a very little girl, she used to play with pansies for hours together. I'm glad I always let her have just as many as she liked. Pick all you want, please,—the very biggest, prettiest ones you can find. And please come again soon. Because I'm so very lonely."

"I'm dreadfully lonely, too," Lloyd told her, in another queer burst of confidence.

The little Princess smiled up at her sadly. "Lonely down there, with all those dear girls!" she sighed. "How can you be?" Then she laughed. "Each of us imagines that she's the only lonesome body in the world. That's absurd, isn't it, because the world is just full of lonely bodies. The thing for us all to do is to find one another out and make friends. I'm glad we two have found each other out. And now we mustn't lose each other. So please come again soon."

Once awakened by Nancy's hint to Lloyd Mallory's lack of companionship and amusement, Miss Marshall reproached herself warmly for not having noticed the state of things sooner, and began feeling about carefully for some tactful way of mending matters.

"Did you get on well with Sarah's Princess, Lloyd?" she asked, a day or two after Lloyd's first visit to the Castle. And when Lloyd, her eyes shining, said, "Oh, yes!" Miss Marshall asked her to go again, to return a vase that had come over from the Castle full of roses for Sarah.

This time the Princess was in a questioning mood. She asked Lloyd about her home, made her tell of her silent, busy father and her querulous invalid mother, drew her out to talk about Pete and Ginger and the splendid times she had had with them back in the old happy days, before she

had been seized with her freakish desire to come to Fair Oaks School.

"I never felt lonely out there," said Lloyd at last, "not even the night when Ginger and I got lost and had to camp in the Upper Canyon."

"Well, you're not going to be lonely here much longer," announced the Princess with decision. "No, you're not! I'm sure of it, and when I'm sure of things they always come true. Oh, there's something I want to tell you! I'm going to have a party. Just as soon as my little, little girl friend is well enough, I want her and you and my sweet, tall, yellow-haired friend ——"

"That's Nancy Lee," put in Lloyd. "She's my friend, too."

"I was sure you would like each other," cried the Princess. "Then you can't be so dreadfully lonely, because she's a dear. Now run along and go skating with the others. They're having a perfectly splendid time down there to-day."

Lloyd wasn't a fine skater—there had been no opportunity for skating out on the ranch. But she learned quickly and easily, and she loved the sense of swift, strong motion through the crisp air. Especially she liked to skate away from the rest, keeping close to the shore of the lake, which curved sharply just beyond the boat-house. Skating up there, alone, as it seemed, Lloyd felt hap-

pier than she had been for months—since Miss Dutton discovered her custom of solitary nocturnal strolls on the campus, and kindly but firmly put a stop to them. The great, silent outdoor world that Lloyd knew and loved and understood seemed suddenly to have come back into her life, and to have smoothed out the wrinkles, and comforted her for all the slights and snubs and worries, which, after having loomed so big and threatening, shrank back to littleness and unimportance.

And on Monday night—Carnival night—she could skate up the lake by moonlight. She could skate as far as she liked—way around the lake, maybe. Nobody would miss her, and nobody would follow her ; the other girls all seemed to prefer the smoother ice near the boat-house—the rink, as it was called, which Thomas the gardener flooded every night to keep it in perfect condition. There would be bonfires there on Carnival evening, and music to skate by, and fun—fun for everybody but Lloyd Mallory, who could not learn how to make friends.

Close to the lakeside, just around the curve of the shore, there was a great fallen tree. When she got tired of skating, Lloyd planned to sit on that log, watching the fun,—which was the only way she had of enjoying it,—listening to snatches of the merry talk, thinking about Sarah's dear little

Princess, and hoping, that in some mysterious way, the prophecy that she had made so confidently about Lloyd's future at school would come true.

"But it won't," sighed Lloyd, as, on Carnival evening, she carried out her program. "She doesn't understand about me—that's all. Lovely things happen to you when you make them, and I can't make anything lovely happen to me."

Dressed all in brown, Lloyd sat quite still on the big brown log, looking very much like a gnarled, bumpy branch. Girls in white sweaters swept unsuspiciously by her hiding-place, girls in scarlet mackinaw coats, Kittie Westervelt resplendent in blue velvet with fluffy white furs and a new fur toque, Vera Lawson in a sledge-chair drawn by two devoted admirers, wearing the sealskin coat that her indulgent mother had first seriously refused and then foolishly sent her. Upon the bank Nancy Lee, resolutely cheerful, walked back and forth with Helena Curtis and one or two other girls who did not skate, watching the Carnival. Lloyd considered joining them, sure of a welcome from Nancy; but she finally decided to stay where she was until all the stragglers had gone back to the rink. Then she would have one more lovely, moonlit spin up the bank, take off her skates by the log, and go through the shrubbery back to the house.

Somehow to-night Lloyd shrank with peculiar sensitiveness from having anybody know that she had no partners to skate with,—that there was nobody who wanted her, no little party of close friends that she belonged to. Why, her unpopularity was so pronounced and so well understood that she had not even been offered a "skate program"!

Kittie Westervelt, on the other hand, had been busy filling hers out ever since Carnival night was first discussed. For several days past she had had nothing left, and she had flaunted the fact in Lloyd's face, ostentatiously asking her opinion about "splitting" skates and engaging "extra-extras," until poor Lloyd dropped all pretenses.

"I haven't a single skate engaged," she confessed. "I'm going to skate alone to-night, as I always do."

"I could give you the fifth—no, the sixth extra-extra," Kittie offered with patronizing sympathy.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Lloyd, and turned away with a hurt look in her eyes that made even Kittie wish she had not spoken.

But even a person with a full program, a velvet skating-costume, and a new fur toque, is not immune from disappointments. Kittie's overtook her well on in the evening, when she discovered

that Vera Lawson had forgotten to save her the skate she had promised, and had given it instead to Margaret Lewis. Kittie disliked Margaret Lewis because she had won a place in the coveted Junior House. She envied her because her hair curled. So it was particularly irritating that Vera, pretending to be very conscientious but really, so Kittie felt sure, choosing the best skater, should refuse to give Kittie precedence, and at the last minute too, when all desirable partners were engaged.

"Let's all three skate together," suggested Margaret pleasantly; but Kittie, with an air of injured innocence, started off alone.

"No, thank you," she called back over her shoulder. "I really prefer skating by myself. I want to practice."

Kittie certainly needed practice. She moved along in the wobbly, uncertain fashion of a girl who is used to being always held up and balanced by her partners; and, because she knew she was making a very poor figure, she headed straight across the rink and out toward the middle of the lake, where her lack of skill would be less conspicuous.

"Air-holes out there, K. Westervelt," shouted Jane after her.

Apparently Kittie heard Jane, though she did

not deign to answer ; for she swerved in her course and struck back toward the shore, heading straight for Lloyd's log. When she was still well out from land, she evidently assumed that she was out of the danger-zone, of which Thomas the gardener had solemnly warned everybody,—including Kittie, who had been preoccupied at the time with the becomingness of her new toque. For, happening upon an expanse of particularly smooth ice, she stopped her progress toward shore and began circling round there, moving now with increasing confidence and surer balance.

Lloyd watched her idly, wishing that she would go back to the rink, for it was growing late and she wanted one more solitary skate up the shore that she had come to regard as her own peculiar property. Kittie also wished to go back, but pride forbade her to do so until Margaret's skate with Vera was over.

Suddenly, however, the moon went under a cloud—it was all the fault of that moon, Kittie said afterward. She stopped skating, realizing suddenly that she was a long way from the crowded rink, that it was dark and very lonely where she was, and that she couldn't possibly stay out there alone a minute longer. Then in a sudden panic of fear she struck out for the shore, holding her big muff close up under her chin, and looking, not

at the ice near her but off at the grim, shadowy shore, where, down near the boat-house, she was sure she saw something moving. It couldn't be a bear! It must be a tramp—or a burglar maybe. Kittie swerved wildly in her course, stubbed her toe, fell forward, and went crashing down through the thin ice into the icy water beneath. And as she fell she saw the awful shadow by the boat-house leap up and rush straight at her. Kittie gave a faint scream, and fought back the giant shadow, which grasped at her determinedly amid the crash of breaking ice.

After that, Kittie remembered nothing until she found herself wrapped in hot blankets, in her own bed, with Miss Dutton rubbing the water out of her hair and Miss Cripps forcing a nasty hot drink down her throat.

"Did you catch the burglar?" she demanded faintly, and Miss Cripps told her not to talk, adding in a whisper to Miss Dutton, "Mind evidently wandering."

"Did he get my white muff?" demanded Kittie again anxiously. "What happened to me, anyway? My mind is all right, Miss Cripps, but that horrid hot stuff, and the tramp—and—and—and—oh, dear!"

Kittie's tears drove Miss Cripps to a dismayed retreat, and Miss Dutton, left in charge, soothed

her hysterical patient by assuring her that she had come up clutching her muff, which was in the laundry drying, with her other wet clothes and her draggled puffs, that there had been no burglars or tramps after her, that she was more frightened than hurt and would be as good as new in the morning; only she must drink that hot lemonade, all of it, quick, this very minute.

Kittie grew tearful again. "Who pushed me in"—she gulped down another swallow of the hated lemonade—"if there wasn't a burglar or a tramp? Besides, I saw one. I distinctly saw him running at me."

Miss Dutton considered. "Why, that was Lloyd Mallory, your roommate, running to rescue you, Kittie. If she hadn't been so quick, this might have been a pretty serious ducking for you. She caught you the first time you came up."

"Oh!" said Kittie, and drank the rest of the lemonade in silence. "I hope Lloyd is safe," she added politely, handing back the glass.

"Perfectly safe," Miss Dutton assured her gaily. "She got pretty wet, of course, but she wouldn't even go to bed. She's changed her clothes, and she's down in the gym. now, popping Carnival chestnuts and being lionized. A little lionizing won't spoil her, though. She's a splendid girl, isn't she? It took a lot of pluck to skate out to

you, over the thin ice. But of course you're such friends that she wouldn't have stopped to think of the danger."

"She's—very brave, I guess," said Kittie, and closed her eyes languidly. Presently Miss Dutton departed, as Kittie had hoped, and Kittie was left alone to consider her awkward predicament—owing her life, perhaps, to a girl she had been "mean as dirt" to.

Down in the gym. Nancy Lee, who had been on the scene next after Lloyd, and, lying flat on her face, had reached out and pulled both girls off the bad ice, shared with Lloyd the honors of the occasion.

"Weren't you scared?" the other girls asked wonderingly, feeding the heroines with the biggest chestnuts and the brownest marshmallows. "Didn't you hate to go?"

"Why, no," Nancy told them. "But then, what I did wasn't dangerous. It just took a little thinking." Nancy glanced proudly at Miss Marshall, who smiled back at her. "You'll have to ask Lloyd how it feels to risk your life."

Lloyd flushed shyly. "Oh, it doesn't feel exactly. I just went as fast as I could. I thought Kittie would be rather easily frightened. Yes, I suppose I hated to go—— Yes, I was afraid, but I was more afraid not to go. It would have

haunted me always, the way the gray sheep haunt old Bill."

"Old Bill?" questioned her eager listeners.

"He's one of father's sheep-herders—or he used to be. He was with the X Bar outfit the year of the sheep and cattle war, and he hid, and let the cattlemen run all his sheep off the edge of Sage Brush Canyon. He had to stay there and watch them jump and die. After a week or so, he wandered back to the ranch, and now he sits in the sun all day by his cabin door, counting the sheep as they go over the precipice. I always think of poor Bill when I'm afraid to do something."

"Could he have saved the sheep if he hadn't hid?" asked Nancy.

"He could have tried," said Lloyd. "Father didn't blame him," she added hastily. "He gives him a cabin and rations, just the same as before, and he will, until Bill dies. But it must be dreadful to be haunted like that."

"Where do you live, Lloyd?" asked Billy Bray abruptly.

Lloyd explained.

"How interesting!" commented Vera Lawson patronizingly, "to live on a big farm, with sheep and cows and hens and all that kind of thing."

"There are no hens, and the sheep are miles away," said Lloyd, in the interests of accuracy,

"and the cattle never come near the home ranch except at branding times."

"How many sheep do you keep?" inquired Vera sweetly.

Lloyd considered. "Only about eight thousand. You see we're really in the cattle country."

"Only about eight thousand!" repeated Billy Bray gaily. "Only a few, she says! How many cattle, Lloyd?"

Lloyd, suddenly shy, did not know.

"Tell us all about your ranch."

"What on earth is an 'X Bar outfit'?"

"How many sheep-herders do you keep besides old Bill?"

"Who cooks for all those men?"

"What do you do out there to have fun?"

Lloyd, who had lived solitary and apart all her life, and never more so than since she came to Fair Oaks, suddenly found herself the center of flattering attentions, involved in a vortex of eager questions.

"Your father must be an awfully rich man." One of the Fashion Plates thus summed up the crumbs of the information contained in Lloyd's shy, hesitating accounts of life on the Mallory ranches.

Lloyd flushed pinker than ever under her tan. "He never told me so," she gasped.

"People who are well bred don't talk about money," announced Vera Lawson, with a scathing glance at the offending Fashion Plate. Vera was not exactly defending Lloyd; she was merely seizing a good opportunity to assert her authority and to strengthen it by an alliance with the popular side.

"Tell us another story, like the one about old Bill and the gray sheep," suggested Nancy Lee tactfully.

Lloyd looked puzzled. "Why, that's not a story," she demurred. "It—just happened."

"Well, it's a ghost story all the same," declared Plain Mary Smith practically. "Aren't there any more ghosts on your farm? It's big enough to have dozens of them."

So Lloyd told them about the ghost of Old Man Dawson, that rides up and down Painted Gorge between Lost Canyon, where Old Man Dawson used to hide his herd of stolen cattle, and Cottonwood Glen, where he met the Girl from Home, who was really the Little Sheriff from Gray Ridge in disguise, with his biggest pistol safely hidden under his calico petticoats.

Lloyd told her story well. She pictured the sunny, sandy trail that straggles up the Gorge, with the gaunt red rocks rising on each side like sentinels, and the river roaring, as if in a hungry

rage, far below on the right. She made the girls see the cabin in Lost Canyon, a little log house splashed with red mud like blood, with the big, red-stained corral behind it, and Old Man Dawson in the door, staring fixedly down the hot trail, watching for the Sheriff to come and arrest him for the murder of little Pete and Crabbed Joe and the Boy, the three who had known too much about Old Man Dawson's cattle raids. And when they lured him down to the Glen sweet-hearting, and six deputies hidden in the tangle by the river jumped out and caught him, he just slipped away as if by magic, jumped on the Little Sheriff's pinto pony, and with a wave of his hand and a gay good-bye, rode her over the edge of Painted Gorge, that dropped off two hundred feet just there. And now the cowboys, overtaken by the dark in the Gorge, meet him, riding like the wind with fear behind; and the cabin and the corrals stand empty in Lost Canyon, with the best pasturage on the ranches going to waste around them.

"Why, I should be afraid to stir outdoors if I lived on your ranch," said timid little Christina, when Lloyd had finished.

"I certainly don't believe I should ride up Painted Gorge alone," added Margaret Lewis.

Lloyd turned to her smilingly. "Oh, yes, you would. Because there's never any one to ride

with me, and it's the only place where the white columbine grows. There are great beds of it in Cottonwood Glen."

The Carnival Celebration broke up then, and Lloyd went up-stairs with Nancy.

"No wonder you weren't specially scared to-night," Nancy told her admiringly, "when you've ridden alone in a place like that Painted Gorge."

"I got lost there once and had to camp all night with Ginger," Lloyd told her.

"Honestly!" Nancy's eyes were as big as saucers. "Why in the world didn't you ever tell me these things before, Lloyd?"

"Why, they're nothing. They—just—happened," protested Lloyd modestly.

"Well, we'll keep you talking pretty fast from now on," Nancy assured her. "How's Kittie, I wonder?"

Kittie, having decided to postpone unpleasant interviews till morning, was ostentatiously asleep, the light turned on to keep off stray burglars, and her damp hair tightly twisted up on curlers just as usual. The next morning, in her most becoming boudoir cap, she lay languidly back on a hand-embroidered pillow, and thanked Lloyd feelingly for saving her life—a ceremony which caused Lloyd much painful embarrassment. Also, she received the commiserations and congratulations

of her friends, including Vera Lawson, who stayed only a minute, but left a tearful and anguished Kittie behind her. For Vera had called her snobbish, stupid, and a silly little thing. She had declared solemnly that she regretted having taken Kittie's part against Lloyd Mallory. Finally she had consented to allow Kittie to remain in the envied position of one of her "crushes" on two hateful conditions: she must keep Vera's room dusted for a month, beginning immediately, and lend her her pearl pendant until further notice. Vera departed wearing the pendant; and Kittie, in a rage with all the world, dressed and appeared, unprepared, in Junior English. For how, if she missed classes, could she manage to do Vera's dusting, beginning immediately?

CHAPTER XVIII

SARAH'S VERY OWN PARTY

SARAH'S party was to be a Winter Picnic. Several times poor Nancy, with the responsibility of it all on her shoulders, wished that party at the bottom of the lake,—and the lake in the middle of the Sahara desert. For every afternoon through four dragging weeks after Carnival night, Nancy had to watch that lake swarming with merry skaters.

"Don't you wish you hadn't been quite so good?" demanded Grace Allen hatefully, one day when Nancy had unwittingly offended her.

"No fun having a Triangler who can't play hockey," grumbled Jane, not meaning to be cruel.

"Too bad you can't come too, you poor Nancy," little Christina, swinging her skates over her shoulder, would say with tactless sympathy.

And at dinner the talk was all of hockey matches, figure eights, and "grape-vines," ice races, and the marvelous way the cold weather held.

It hurt—oh, but it hurt!

"I guess I am spoiled," Nancy wrote in the red

journal. "I never gave up anything that I liked before,—and I don't ever intend to again. So now!

"Just the same I am improving. When I start to do something silly I usually remember skating, and generally I don't do it. It's awful to have to grow up! Little girls can be as silly and careless as they like, and people call it 'cute.' But big girls!"

And one sunny, windy February day Nancy wrote: "Miss Marshall looked at me this morning, and I thought she was certainly going to let me off about skating. But she never did. If I have to see the girls out there on the ice much longer I shall burst! Why, I dream about skating.

"N. B. Nancy Lee, don't you be a goose!"

So it was fortunate, perhaps, that Nancy had an absorbing, if sometimes troublesome, party to plan and engineer to a successful climax; it kept her from getting positively morbid about the ice.

She chose a Winter Picnic for Sarah, because, as she explained disjointedly to Miss Marshall, "it sounds queer and different, and some parts can be for Sarah and others the older girls will like. And then,"—Nancy's gray eyes grew plaintive,—"when you can't do a thing, you are always just crazy to, that is, if you're like me, Miss Marshall."

Nancy remembered how perfectly that description fitted the situation about skating, and, too proud to complain, added hastily, "Nobody can go on picnics in winter, I mean, and so they sound just splendid then."

You prepare for a Winter Picnic, it seems, by collecting all the evergreen boughs you can, and arranging them to look as much as possible like a real picnic grove. A camp-fire, which is a very desirable feature, was easily arranged for in Fair Oaks gym. There may be as many fish-ponds as you like, scattered among the trees. And of course the crowning feature of any picnic, no matter what the season, is the food, which should arrive in baskets, include olives and sandwiches, and be served in true *al fresco* style, on the ground among the trees.

Thomas the gardener got Nancy her shrubbery, and made a beautiful standard to hold each tree upright. Miss Marshall ordered a special supply of big birch logs for the fire, and told Nancy to submit her menu for approval, and Cook would do the rest. This left nothing for Nancy but the incidental picnic amusements, and those seemed easy enough, and would have been easy enough, if Fair Oaks school had not been, just then, in a rather critical, faultfinding mood. Schools get into moods, just like people, and it is even harder

to coax them back into a sensible, pleasant frame of mind.

Jane Learned began the trouble by discovering that the Winter Picnic was to come on February Fourteenth, and to take the place of the regular Fair Oaks Valentine party. Now Jane cared not a fig for valentine parties, but she had planned a beautiful valentine for Kittie, in which "muff" rhymed with "puff," "tramp" with "stamp," "break" with "lake" and so on in the most unprecedentedly accommodating fashion. So Jane wailed loudly about the loss of the Valentine party.

Vera Lawson wanted a Valentine party because she thought she would get more violets that way. Kittie Westervelt wanted something for which you could dress up. Nancy explained that you were supposed to dress up in your oldest clothes for the Winter Picnic; but that did not appeal to Kittie at all. The Fashion Plates unanimously announced that they just detested picnics of any kind. Little Sarah, having cross-questioned Nancy until she was obliged to explain that she probably wasn't coming to the Picnic, blandly announced that she didn't want to go either.

Nancy, feeling completely discouraged, retired to her desk and thought hard. A Winter Picnic would certainly be fun—Nancy had been to one

at home that was splendid—but nothing is fun if you are sure beforehand that it isn't going to be. Somehow or other she must arouse enthusiasm. And there must be valentine features to propitiate Jane and Vera. Nancy thought hard for ten minutes more, then hunted up Thomas the gardener, and told him to get her one nice little tree that wasn't an evergreen.

Next Nancy sought out Jane. "Your valentine for Kittie will be all right," she began. "I mean I want it for the Picnic. No, there won't be a valentine box exactly; but I can use that valentine. And, Jane, please make the girls like the Picnic. You know how to make them like things. Because we've got to have it now, I guess."

"Oh, I don't mind," agreed Jane carelessly, "so long as my valentine fits in. I say, Nancy, let's have spruce gum on the trees, and signs that you take it off at your own risk. That means at the risk of a lecture on bad manners from Crippsy."

Nancy laughed. "You can't let the poor old thing alone, can you? Well, there's going to be a Gum Tree. Miss Marshall suggested it herself, and said she had no objections for this once. Also a Peanut Vine, and a Pop-Corn Bush,—besides the tree that's a Valentine feature. I'm not going to tell you about that."

Jane rose hastily. "I'll go and copy the

valentine for Kittie. Your party sounds all right to me."

After that things went better. Particularly did they look up when Nancy discovered that Miss Marshall was assuming as a matter of course that Nancy was going to the Picnic. She was too tired of it to care much whether or not she went; but she had been dreading the girls' questions if she stayed away. Now nobody need ever know that the Winter Picnic was the end of her "I-Forgot Girl" penance.

And then the very day before the Picnic, when everybody was eager and interested, when Cook had promised to make Banbury tarts and apple turnovers, and Nancy had finished decorating the lovely little Heart Tree and hidden it away in her locker in the gym. basement, she discovered that she had been careless again. She had lost Jane's beautifully rhymed valentine.

"I'm sorry," she told Jane contritely. "I thought it was in my desk, but I must have thrown it away yesterday, when I cleaned up my things in a hurry."

Jane looked decidedly cross. "You'd better hunt through the waste paper in the basement," she said.

"Oh, dear, I haven't time!" wailed Nancy, but Jane was inexorable and Nancy spent ten precious

minutes hunting for Thomas, who told her that all the waste paper had been burned up the evening before.

So Nancy returned dejectedly to Jane, who still sternly refused to forgive the loss of her precious valentine. She had found Kittie Westervelt, explained about the valentine, and assured Kittie that it was really her property; and Kittie, aroused to all sorts of delightful anticipation by Jane's adroit hints, was even more disappointed and disagreeable than Jane had been.

"But, Kittie, I've said I'm sorry," insisted Nancy. "I can't get it back for you after it's been burned. But Jane can write it over, can't you, Jane?"

Jane shook her head in melancholy fashion. "Oh, no, not that valentine!"

"Well, then write another," suggested Nancy, tired of the futile discussion. "There was nothing so wonderful about that one that I could see. It was just a grind, Kittie, about your falling into the lake and ——"

Kittie, who had expected something much more romantic and thrilling, gave vent to a disappointed, "Was that all?"

"Depends on what you mean by all," snapped Jane, justifiably angry at Nancy for giving her secret away. She turned to Nancy. "You've carelessly lost my property—or Kittie's—and now

you've spoiled all my fun. So if your party is spoiled ——"

Leaving her threat thus vaguely terrible, Jane departed, dragging Kittie with her.

"Spoil things all you want to," Nancy called after them pettishly. She felt quite safe about Jane's getting at the picnic grove, which was securely locked up in the gym. hall—except the Heart Tree, which was still down in Nancy's locker. Also, Jane had to go to Sewing Class, and there was an algebra test to-morrow. Jane would be too busy to think up anything to do. Only Jane thought so easily! She might just as well have been pleasant and written another valentine; it wouldn't have been any work at all for her. Nancy suddenly remembered that she had promised Thomas to come right back and get him the Heart Tree, the standard of which was rather wobbly, and needed strengthening. Running to catch up, like the White Queen in "Alice," Nancy hastened to the gym. basement, and opened her locker. The beautiful Heart Tree, with its dainty trimmings of pink cherry blossoms and its gay festoon of heart-shaped bonbon boxes, had vanished!

"Of course!" sighed Nancy. "My locker doesn't lock tight—because I've forgotten the key so many times, and pried the lock open in a hurry. Jane knows that. But I didn't think she knew

that I kept any of the Picnic things here. Oh, dear, that's the study-bell! How can I study algebra when they've taken my Heart Tree? Well, I'll have to try."

Nancy's scholastic efforts did not amount to much algebraically; but sitting still cooled her wrath, and second thoughts, which were generally, in Nancy's case, much better than first ones, put a different aspect on the afternoon's trouble.

"I was careless. I hate poetry, so I never thought much about Jane's. Maybe it was good enough. Maybe it was funnier than I thought. Anyway I ought to have kept that valentine safe somewhere, and I oughtn't to have told Kittie what was in it. That wasn't playing fair. Brother Dick would just hate me for that. What's that funny noise? It's those twins giggling. Oh, if the release bell would only ring!"

The minute it did ring, Nancy dashed across the hall to the Unmixed Study. Jane, wearing a haughty stare, answered her knock, and, assisted by a carefully adjusted screen, barred her view of the room.

"Oh, Jane," began Nancy hastily, "I am sorry about the valentine. I am honestly, cross-my-heart sorry—not just to say so. And it was extra-mean of me to tell Kittie about what was in it. I don't blame you a bit for getting mad."

Jane's haughty stare dissolved instantly into an astonished grin.

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "I'd almost forgotten our late unpleasantness. I thought you'd come for—missed anything, Nancy?"

Nancy was too much worried to reciprocate Jane's gaiety. "The girls will be awfully disappointed if we can't have the Valentine feature," she said sadly.

"Can't have it!" Jane drew back the screen with a grandiloquent bow. "Oh, maybe for about one minute I was mad enough to spoil something of yours, but I found something more amusing to do. Come in and see your Valentine Tree."

"We're going to take them all off, if you don't like them, Nancy," said little Christina from the floor beside the Heart Tree, where she sat working busily under Jane's direction.

The Heart Tree was a bushy sapling whose bare branches Nancy had trimmed with tiny blossoms of pink paper, and hung with heart-shaped bonbon boxes. On the slender trunk was nailed a sign which said, "Picnickers shall be blindfolded before trying to pick off their Sweet-Hearts." There was nothing especially original about the Heart Tree, but Nancy had thought that the awkward attempts of the girls to get off the hearts would make fun. Now half the Sweet-Hearts lay

"COME IN AND SEE YOUR VALENTINE TREE"

in a pile on the floor, and all sorts of queer hearts hung in their places.

"Not everybody ought to get a Sweet-Heart, you know, Nancy," explained Jane, viewing her improvements admiringly. "The whole fascination of Sweet-Hearts, as far as I've been able to discover, lies in there never being enough of 'em to go round. So we've put on various other Hearts. Light Hearts"—Jane pointed to two of palest pink—"Soft Hearts"—Jane poked her finger into a small heart-shaped cushion, whose double Christina was stuffing—"Broken Hearts, and Hearts Bleeding but not broken——" Jane dangled some realistic drops of blood contrived out of small red candies. "It's a Rule, of course, that you have to take the first Heart that you touch. And I've rewritten the lost valentine, or rather I've written another, and we're going to label it 'the Heart of a Kittie.' That's to tease K. Westervelt for having been fooled by all my egregious remarks. I shall be tickled pink if the great Vera draws a Broken Heart."

"Oh, Jane, it's lovely! It's just as clever as it can be." Nancy surveyed her glorified idea joyously.

"Of course it doesn't interest me in the least," Jane announced, with a shrug. "But it will take with the Sentimentalists, and the Gum Tree and the Peanut Vine will take with the Sensibles,—

meaning me. I say, Nancy, you've got to lend me your alarm clock for to-morrow morning. That algebra test still awaits my distinguished consideration."

Between the Heart Tree, and the Gum Tree, the Pop-Corn Bush, and the Peanut Vine, not to mention the potato race, which Plain Mary Smith won by a display of amazing agility in one so stout, and the fishing contests in the circular ponds which careless persons might have mistaken for wash-tubs, but which fairly swarmed with catchable fish,—with all these features Sarah's very own party was, as Jane said, "a jolly go,"—which exactly expressed Sarah's sentiments.

But the best part of all, of course, was the picnic supper. Then everybody sat down close together in a big sociable group in the thickest part of the wood, while the coffee boiled in a huge pot over the fire, and sandwiches, salads, olives, Banbury tarts and apple turnovers circulated through the crowd, together with eager reminiscences of other picnic feasts.

Margaret Lewis knew how to make a toaster out of twigs. It would hold as many as eight slices of bread at once.

Mildred Wallace had fried griddle cakes in the woods. Jane and Christina had much to say about bacon broiled to a turn on sticks.

But Plain Mary Smith had the best stories to tell. Plain Mary, it seemed, was an orphan, and usually spent her vacations with her guardian. But last summer he had gone to Europe, and Plain Mary had gone camping.

"We used to go on picnics every single pleasant day," she explained eagerly, "and we baked biscuits, and fried trout, and made omelets. So now! There's nothing like camping out, I think. Why, I cried quarts when I had to leave and come here."

"We noticed a few tear-drops," laughed Jane, "but now that we understand we don't blame you, Mary. I say, girls, doesn't this seem just like a real wood?"

"Spring will be here now before we know it," put in Margaret Lewis, "and then maybe—Miss Marshall, may we have a real outdoor picnic next term?"

"You may have several," agreed Miss Marshall smilingly. "Ask the old girls if spring term here isn't a series of 'real' picnics, with lessons between to keep you from tiring of the outdoor life. You see,"—she looked around the circle of eager girlish faces,—"I want above all to send out strong, healthy girls from Fair Oaks. In the fall we are busy getting ready for our winter's work—getting the new girls broken in to the school routine. But in the spring—oh, we work then, of course—

harder than ever perhaps, while we are at it, because we have learned how. Even on our picnics and boating parties we work—you new girls will find out how when the time comes."

"You don't mean that we've all got to learn to row and swim, Miss Marshall?" demanded Kittie anxiously.

Miss Marshall laughed. "If you're going to skate on thin ice again soon, I should certainly advise you to get a little more familiar with the water. But I shan't insist on either swimming or rowing, unless your parents do."

"I'm just hoping to be on one of the crews," sighed Margaret Lewis.

"So am I." Nancy Lee's gray eyes sparkled with anticipation. "And I want to learn to swim too. Oh, I should just love to go camping! My brother Dick is always going. Boys can have so much more fun than girls."

"Outdoor fun, you mean," corrected Billy Bray. "That's why they're generally more sensible than girls, I think. Girls that stay around indoors,—never play tennis or tramp or skate or anything,—are always awful sillies." Billy lowered her voice to the key of confidences. "And they have a sad life of it here spring term, I may say. No moping about in the shade in flossy clothes—not if Miss Marshall knows it. Most of 'em finally come

to their senses and join in the fun; but I doubt if Kittie Westervelt enjoys herself particularly."

"Our kid brothers are Boy Scouts," announced Jane suddenly. "I wish there were Girl Scouts. They learn lots of jolly things, like how to light a fire with one match; and they go off on splendid long hikes."

"Don't they promise to do things, such as being kind to older people and animals, and telling the truth, and all that?" asked Mildred Wallace vaguely.

"Good promises for boys or girls to make," smiled Miss Marshall, who had been listening attentively to the conversation. "And now this picnic must adjourn, I'm afraid, to be continued around another camp-fire, in a real spring wood."

CHAPTER XIX

SEEN FROM A FIRE-ESCAPE

Gloom pervaded the Unmixed Study at evening recreation. Of the half-dozen habitués, not one looked as if she ever meant to smile again. For Miss Cripps had moved into the suite below the twins' apartments; the happy, care-free atmosphere of the Unmixed Study could never be the same thereafter.

"Hateful old thing! She's done it just on purpose to spy around and get something on us terrible twins," snapped Jane Learned irritably. It was on Jane, of course, that Miss Cripps's unwarrantable action bore hardest.

"Where can we have our nice bumpy amusements now!" sighed Nancy Lee, staring sadly down at her feet. After having promised them for weeks past Miss Marshall's Mary Ann had that very afternoon lent Nancy some real, wooden soled clogging shoes. Nancy had rushed over to the Unmixed Study at the first stroke of the release gong, prepared to show off her prize, only to be met by Jane's appalling announcement.

"There's one sure thing," put in little Christina,

over whom the news had thrown a cloud of dreadful responsibility. "Jane simply mustn't spill the water pitcher again. It's bad enough explaining it to anybody, but to her!" Christina fell dumb before the awful thought.

Jane laughed grimly. "I won't spill it again," she promised, and turned with a sigh to the others. "Christina always expects my history to repeat its frightful disasters. What really will happen, Christina darling, is that I shall do something quite different but equally fatal, such as—oh, having a nightmare and falling out of bed with a shriek. I say, that wouldn't be a bad thing to do, would it now? Crippsy would have to step lively to look into that."

"She'd come just as she was, maybe, and then you could settle the dispute about her nightgowns being red flannel," suggested Kittie Westervelt, with a giggle.

"And discover how she achieves those wonderful crimps," added Margaret Lewis laughingly.

"And watch her nose wrinkle the way it always does when she gets furiously annoyed," put in Jane. "Oh, that nightmare will be a little bit of all right! Guess I'll have it to-night,—if I can keep awake long enough."

"Oh——" began Christina, and paused as she remembered that remonstrance only increased Jane's

enthusiasm for her harebrained projects. "Do you suppose Miss Cripps thinks her crimps are pretty?" demanded Christina hastily, to cover her retreat.

"She must," asserted Kittie Westervelt with a certainty born of experience, "or else she wouldn't take such a fearful lot of trouble over them."

"Umph! She doesn't mind trouble," sniffed Jane. "See the trouble she's taken to move in under here, just to bother us."

"Didn't somebody say that the Mason sisters were delicate and needed rooms with more sun?" asked Margaret Lewis. "Miss Cripps is a queer, crusty old thing, but she's kind-hearted. Think how she works for that Labrador charity."

"I wish her charity would begin nearer home," said Kittie feelingly. "I need some of it terribly."

Nancy Lee had been staring at the clog shoes and thinking hard. "Isn't it queer," she broke in now, "to realize that a funny, frumpy old thing like Miss Cripps was a little girl once, and maybe went to boarding-school, like us ——"

"She went to college," put in Margaret, "the same college as Miss Dutton."

"Well, to college then," amended Nancy, "and that she had girl friends and good times and hard examinations, and maybe even love affairs."

Nancy's final suggestion was greeted with jeering scorn. Even Margaret Lewis could not believe that Miss Cripps had ever had a lover.

"Well, anyhow she had a mother and father," persisted Nancy, "and maybe brothers and sisters. She's enjoyed things, and been fond of people. She's lived! She wasn't always just dried up and fussy and bothersome. Even now she's a real person, with feelings to be hurt. But Jane talks about her—we all think about her—as if she was nothing but a teaching machine."

"And a spying machine," added Jane sharply. "I dare you to go ahead and do your clog dance, Nancy Lee. If Crippsy comes up to remonstrate, why, you can try treating her like a human being with feelings, and see how you come out."

"All right." Nancy saw several objections against putting her theory of Miss Cripps to the test Jane proposed; but she had been "dared," and that was generally enough for Nancy. So she laced the wonderful shoes a little tighter, while Jane bundled the audience on to the window-seat and crowded the chairs into corners, to leave a wide cleared space for Nancy's performance.

"Rig a jig, jig, and away we go!" chanted the audience lustily, and Nancy began. Oh, but those clogging shoes clattered! Her eyes on the door, her ears open for Miss Cripps's inevitable knock,

Nancy jigged on, nervously at first, then gaily, and at last breathlessly. She hated to stop before Miss Cripps came, but she had to.

"Splendid! Great! Oh, don't stop!" cried the audience, as Nancy flung herself panting into a chair.

"Why doesn't she come?" queried little Christina nervously, a minute later.

"Give her time," said Jane acidly. "She's an artist in this kind of thing. At present she is engaged in keeping her victims in unpleasant suspense."

But five minutes went by, and still no Miss Cripps had appeared to inquire into the deafening clatter above her head. Nancy gave a sigh of relief.

"She's gone out, maybe," she suggested.

But Jane, opening the window and dangling her lank form out over the sill, announced that "she" wasn't out. At least the gas was burning in her quarters.

Then Nancy had an inspiration. "I dare you to go down your new fire-escape and see if she's there, Jane Learned," she cried gaily.

Some additional rope fire-escapes had been installed a day or two before in the third-floor rooms, and all the daring spirits on the corridor had announced their intention of trying them.

"Oh, Nancy!" reproached Christina.

"Done!" smiled Jane. "You're getting to be a regular genius of a Triangler, Nancy Lee."

"But, Jane," protested Christina, "these fire-escapes are different from any of the ones you ever tried. You'll get hurt. Or else you'll get caught. Please don't dare her such a foolish dare, Nancy. Please don't go, Jane."

Jane was already hard at work disentangling the twisted mass of ropes, bands and pulleys that made up the new fire-escape.

"I should think it would go so,—and so," she murmured absently, slipping the apparatus over her head. "Don't make a fuss, Christina"—she turned to her twin. "If you won't, I'll postpone the nightmare. And just to please her, Nancy—because she hates so to have me get into a fix—give me a rehearsal on the fire-escape at the bedroom window. Crippsy isn't under that side of us. Now don't you scream, Christina. Come on, everybody, and help pull me up."

Amid much giggling and whispering and a suppressed shriek from Kittie, Jane went triumphantly down, and was hauled laboriously up again. Then Nancy went down, and Margaret; and Kittie and Christina each made a false start and had to be pulled in, badly frightened, over the window sill.

Finally Jane declared that there had been alto-

gether too much rehearsing, and the party returned to the Unmixed Study, where there was another delay because Nancy wanted to go down first this time.

"I thought of it," she begged, "and you asked me to swap the dare to the other window, Jane. So I think it's only my fair chance."

"Just let me reconnoiter a bit," Jane temporized, and dangled out the window again, head downward, in a fashion so reckless and alarming that her friends all flew to the rescue.

"Thanks," said Jane calmly, as she felt her skirt clutched, and seized the opportunity to dangle a little further. Then suddenly she jerked herself back and sat down hard on the broad window-seat, knocking over Kittie and Christina in the process.

"Go ahead, Nancy Lee," she said, "but remember that I'm the soul of noble generosity to let you. Because I think she's in, and I'm almost sure her shade's up. This is going to be any amount riskier than the nightmare."

"But her shade can't be up," chorused the others, for Miss Cripps's views on the question of drawn shades were well known.

"Shocking, isn't it?" said Jane, assuming her Miss Cripps manner. "I really could not have believed you capable of such carelessness, Miss Learned," she mimicked wickedly. "A boarding-

school for young ladies is, pray note, an object of peculiar interest to vulgar persons. A grocer's boy lurking under the pines by our service entrance, a tramp loitering along Holly Road, the maids from Mrs. Barton's enjoying an evening out, all take peculiar pleasure in staring up at our lighted windows. A sweet, absorbed face bent over lessons or letters home should not be subject to the prying gaze of strangers." Jane paused to enjoy her own oratory. "You know the rest, my dears, and the hour of evening gambols is well-nigh spent. Go along, Nancy Lee, and if her shade is up wave wildly as you fly by."

"I will." Nancy climbed over the window-seat, adjusted the fire-belt, and issued her final orders. "Don't any of you dare make a noise. Pull me up as fast as you can, specially past her window. Christina and Kittie, remember not to scream."

With a steady, resolute hand on the pulleys, Nancy slid off the sill, swung for a moment in mid-air, and then slipped slowly down toward the window, behind which, presumably, was sheltered the eagle-eyed, sharp-eared martinet, Miss Cripps. The pulley squeaked faintly. Nancy frowned, and then laughed as she looked up at the row of intent, eager faces filling the twins' window.

She was opposite Miss Cripps's room now. Yes, the shade was up. But the light was turned rather

low, so Miss Cripps was probably out. But no! She was in and she was—— It was perfectly evident now why she had chosen to ignore the noisy clog-dance. Waving one hand over her head according to agreement, Nancy brought the fire-escape to a standstill and stared with wide, astonished eyes at the strange spectacle before her. Then, with a sudden hot flush of shame at what she was doing, she turned away her head and started to go down again. Only—she could not start! She gave a little jump in her seat, to add impetus to her efforts. Then she tried to pull back on the ropes. They wouldn't go that way either. And though she turned quite away from the window, even shutting her eyes for a minute, she was conscious all the time of Miss Cripps, sitting there in the dim light, unaware that she was being spied upon, forgetful, for once, of the whole hostile, cruel little world of girls in which she lived, showing her real, pitiful self to the spy outside in the dark.

Nancy hated spying. She hated seeing people feel as Miss Cripps was feeling. She hated the way she and the other girls had treated Miss Cripps, and the tone in which Jane would discuss her present adventure.

"I shan't tell them a thing about it!" she decided hastily.

She tugged and jerked at the ropes. She motioned to be pulled up. They didn't understand up there. They thought she had stopped to see more of Miss Cripps—or, in a mood of mad daring, to give Miss Cripps a better chance to see her. Silently they applauded her boldness. When at last they understood her desperate predicament, they tugged manfully to rescue her. But the pulleys would not work from above, any more than they would for Nancy; and Nancy was too heavy a weight to haul up hand over hand. They succeeded only in swinging her a foot or so nearer to Miss Cripps.

It was embarrassing, humiliating, and oh, but it was cold, swinging out there on a windy March night, in a thin, "Dutch-necked" dinner dress. The girls up above were saying something.

"Go in through Crippsy's window. You'll have to. We can't get you up."

Nancy gave another glance in at the window and shook her head in vehement protest.

"'Fraid-cat," Jane hissed down.

Nancy only shrugged; Jane didn't understand. There was a better reason than lack of courage for not going in that way.

There must have been some magic in the defiance of that shrug. Without warning,—before Nancy could settle herself in her place, or tighten

her grip on the ropes, or even realize what had happened,—she was flying madly down through the air. A splash, a jarring thump, and Nancy Lee, minus a beaded slipper, and plus a complete coating of mud, several bad bruises, and a throbbing pain in her right wrist, sat up in a huddled heap in the mud three stories below the Unmixed Study and tried to think what to do next.

The fire-escape jerked and Nancy slipped hastily out of it. She wasn't going to be drawn up in that, whatever happened. Holding on to her head, which was light and giddy, she felt around for her slipper, and discovered that she was sitting in a hole—a hole that hadn't been there before. She must be hurt if she had come down as hard as that.

"Oh, Nancy, are you killed?" cried Margaret Lewis in a tragic whisper, feeling her way in the dark along the house-wall.

"No, but I'm all muddy," Nancy announced wearily. "And would you please hunt for my slipper, so I can go in where it's warm?"

Jane gallantly groped in the mud till she found the missing slipper, and she and Margaret helped Nancy up-stairs, where Kittie and Christina were waiting to offer sympathy, arnica, and subsequently hot lemonade and Christina's blue swan's-down wrapper, which, with a warm bath, quite

restored Nancy to her accustomed breezy cheerfulness.

"I say," began Jane, when after the lights were out, and Margaret had reluctantly departed to the Junior Cottage, she and Christina, Kittie, Grace Allen, and Nancy were huddled into one small bed, talking over the evening's excitement. "I say, Nancy, you never told us what Crippsy was doing."

"Didn't I?" said Nancy coolly. "Guess."

"Correcting themes, of course," suggested Kittie loftily.

"Crimping her hair," ventured Jane.

"Just sitting and rocking," guessed Grace.

"And thinking up what to do to us about that noisy clog-dance," added Christina, who was always gloomily expecting past offenses to bear unpleasant fruit.

"All wrong," Nancy told them.

"Then she was playing solitaire."

"No, reading poetry."

"Washing out handkerchiefs and sticking them up on her mirror to dry. That's just like her."

"Well, tell us then. We give up."

"I'll tell you," began Nancy solemnly, "on one condition. You've all got to promise to go down and see her to-morrow night—welcome her to the

north hall, I mean, just as we should if Miss Dutton or Miss Marshall or some other popular teacher had moved in here."

"Great hat, Nancy!" objected Jane. "We couldn't call on Crippsy, you know. She'd faint with astonishment."

"Did what you saw have anything to do with our calling on her?" demanded Grace.

"In a way it did," Nancy told them. "Do you promise? It's nothing funny that I saw, Jane. You're not to put it into a monologue, and nobody here is to laugh over it afterward. I'm ashamed to think that I saw it, and perhaps I shouldn't tell any one ——"

"We promise to go and see her, Nancy," interposed Kittie hastily. Kittie's bump of curiosity was very well developed.

"Sure, we promise," agreed Jane, who had reflected that the call might be quite exciting, if properly managed.

"Well," began Nancy, "she was crying. Crying like anything. Sitting holding a funny old picture in her hand, with a funny old white satin dress spread out over the table in front of her. The room looked sort of half unpacked, as if she'd come to the dress and the picture, and was just too miserable to put them away and go on unpacking —and living."

"Was it a man's picture?" inquired Jane in her most satiric voice.

"Yes," said Nancy hotly, "it was a man's picture. I was as near her as I am to you, Jane, and I saw it distinctly. And the dress was probably a wedding-dress. Oh, it does sound silly and made-up and story-bookish as I tell it. If Margaret had seen it she'd make it seem so pathetic that you'd all want to cry. Oh, I can't make you understand at all! I wish I hadn't told you, and oh, I wish I hadn't seen!" Nancy's voice choked suddenly, and Jane—satiric, unsentimental Jane—reached over Grace Allen and patted her shoulder sympathetically.

"We understand all right," she said. "Maybe it was a love-affair and a wedding-dress. Maybe it was only a near-love-affair and the party gown that went with it. Anyhow it was all she had, and it's gone. And nagging a bunch of silly girls who hate her isn't much of a life to look forward to. Maybe she's too far gone to appreciate being treated like—like the Queen of the Sky-Pink Isles," ended Jane, growing suddenly flippant, "but it won't do any harm to try."

"Jane," cried Nancy eagerly, "I dare you to make friends with her—real friends, the way you and Margaret are with Miss Dutton."

"Done," said Jane easily. "Time limit, the end

of the year. Coöperation expected from all those present."

The next evening Miss Cripps was the amazed recipient of a call from the third-corridor girls in her hall. Jane headed the delegation, carrying roses. As a social function, the call was not highly successful. Miss Cripps's suspicion of the twins' motives was deep-rooted. Kittie tried so hard to impress her hostess with her passionate love of study that she quite upset Jane's gravity. Christina was too frightened to talk much; Grace Allen was just a little more silent and somber than usual; and Nancy was absolutely tongue-tied.

"I couldn't talk," she explained later. "I just kept wondering where she'd hidden away the dress and the picture, and thinking how she'd feel if she knew we knew."

"She'd hate it, of course," agreed Jane, "and yet being seen from a fire-escape is probably the best thing that's recently happened to Miss Cripps. By the way, who's done her Saturday theme?"

"A description, isn't it?" asked Grace.

"'From a definite and if possible unique point of view,'" quoted Jane glibly from Miss Cripps's assignment.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Nancy Lee. "Generally I think I could write a decent theme if I could get a

good subject. But this time I can think of a splendid subject, only I mustn't use it."

"What?" demanded Kittie blankly.

"'Seen from a Fire-Escape,' of course," returned Nancy.

"You ran that into the ground last night," laughed Jane. "And if Crippsy had heard you she'd have labeled the product 'theatrical, unnatural, poor choice of detail.' Which shows us," concluded Jane grandiloquently, "that life is not literature. For my part I prefer life. Poor old Crippsy!"

"That's a unique point of view for you, J. Learned," said Nancy Lee.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST THING NANCY FORGOT

THE ice that had tantalized Nancy Lee melted at last, as all ice must. The snow gave place to slush, and then to mud. Winter sports were over for another year. Gym. and dancing classes were winding up with drills and exhibitions. For the long Middle Term at Fair Oaks would end to-morrow.

Nancy Lee, the proud possessor of an excellent report in tidiness and manners for the Middle Term, was busily engaged in packing her trunk in an efficient if not particularly orderly fashion. She had left it till the last minute, and now, in less than half an hour, Thomas the gardener and a truckman would come to clear out the halls. Unless your trunk was ready when Thomas arrived, it could not be sent off till late the following afternoon. Sometimes half an hour is just no time at all.

Recklessly Nancy stuffed in her winter coat, which she hated. She piled shoes on top of her unbecoming winter hat. Then she folded her

brown silk dress very neatly, hoping all the same that mother wouldn't think it was worth the necessary repairs. Finally she got into a kimono, so that she could pack her serge school dress—she would wear her suit on the train. The halls were full of agitated packers; the babel of talk about what to take and what to leave was dreadfully confusing. When at last some one at the end of the corridor called, "They're coming," Nancy slammed down her trunk-cover on a wildly disorderly top tray, and fled to dress, serenely thankful that packing was once more over.

"It doesn't matter so much what I've forgotten," she told Grace. "I can manage all right for two weeks without almost anything. I've left all my summer things here. Don't they look fresh and cool hanging up in the closet? I'm going to put on a thin dress this minute."

Nancy hung up her suit jacket carefully by itself in a corner of the closet, and dressed in a pretty blue and white dimity. Then, borrowing Grace's ulster, which looked better over a thin dress than her own short jacket would, she called for Lloyd and Sarah, and went, by special permission, to say good-bye to the Princess, who had chosen the last day of the term for her tea-party.

It was a sunny April afternoon. The Princess was out in her garden uncovering bulbs.

"Look," she cried, "they've begun coming up already. See those tiny green leaf-points pricking up through the mud! When you come back, the crocuses and jonquils will be in blossom. The snowdrops are budded now. Come and see!"

After they had duly admired the snowdrops, they went in to have tea with Prince Charming, who was as darling a kitten as ever, and had learned to lie down and roll over when his mistress told him to. Rather reluctantly he displayed his new accomplishment for his three friends and was rewarded with cream, which he gobbled up greedily before the others had fairly begun their tea—it wasn't tea at all, but chocolate, which the three guests liked much better.

"I shall miss you all while you're gone," said the Princess. "Flowers and girls are the loveliest things in the world."

"But girls are lots more fun," piped little Sarah, eyeing her beloved Nancy.

And Lloyd added shyly, "You'd get lonely with just flowers—even pansies."

It was a very lovely party, and so restful after the tumult of packing. On the way back to her room Nancy stopped to exchange home addresses with Margaret Lewis, to commiserate with Kittie on Miss Cripps's having assigned her vacation theme-work to do, and to say good-bye to Plain

Mary, whose guardian had written her to meet him that night in Boston. When she finally reached the study Grace Allen was still sitting there idly, just as Nancy had left her. It seemed as natural to Grace to stay where she was, as for Nancy to flit restlessly about whenever she was given the opportunity.

"Mud on my skirt." Nancy held up the spot ruefully. "Well, it can be washed at home,—if I can stuff it into my bag. I suppose I was silly to wear a thin dress over there. The tea-party was great, specially some little caramel cakes with nuts on them. Margaret is going to write to me this vacation. Kittie is in trouble again about themes, so she says she'll have to omit letters entirely. If I write to all the girls I've promised, I guess I shan't do much else."

Grace looked solemnly at her volatile roommate. "How can you like so many people?" she demanded curiously.

"Why, it comes natural, I guess," laughed Nancy. "Of course I like some people better than others. I like you a lot, Grace. I was afraid at first that we shouldn't get on, because you are sort of particular and awfully orderly and—oh, most of the things I'm not. But we get along sort of so-so, don't we? It must be the attraction of opposites that you hear about."

"Next term I'm going to try to be friends with more girls. I guess your way is best."

Suddenly Nancy remembered Jane's remarks about her helping this all-or-nothing girl to be more sensible in her friendships. "Good for you!" she cried. "Be friends with the whole crowd. It's lots more fun. But anyhow be friends with me."

Grace's pale face flushed. "You really want me to?"

"Of course," said Nancy and, afraid of another demonstration of affection, hastily changed the subject to Dick's new collie pup.

But Grace had learned a good many things from Nancy, and from other people at Fair Oaks. One of them was to laugh when the joke was on herself.

So she laughed now. "I don't believe you have a single spark of sentiment in you, Nancy Lee," she declared. "You don't seem to care a bit whether people like you or not."

Nancy considered. "Why—y-e-es, I do, of course—every one likes to be liked. But—I guess I don't think much about it. I sort of expect—not to be hated." Nancy suddenly assumed her "all-over grin." "And I advise you to do the same, Grace Allen. It saves time and energy that you need for other things. Now come on down to dinner."

The next morning was to see the completion of one of Miss Marshall's odd experiments in teaching her girls self-reliance. School closed directly after chapel service, each girl being then at liberty to take the earliest train she chose. Each one had looked up her own train, bought her ticket, got her trunk ready the night before if she wanted it to reach home promptly, and attended to checking it at the school office. All train schedules had been verified by Miss Dutton, but she had sternly refused to give any but the most necessary help, whereat Kittie Westervelt considered her possessed of a heart of stone. There was one other special arrangement for the last morning; no gongs or bells would ring, but any girl who so wished might arrange to be called. Of course, Nancy Lee, who had never in her life waked without a bell or a vigorous rap to rouse her, forgot to arrange. Likewise of course, Grace, whose dread of interfering in other people's business was almost an obsession, put off calling Nancy until it was within ten minutes of chapel time.

Then how Nancy flew! Her bath was reduced to what she referred to, in telling the story later, as a "splash and a dab," her hair was brushed out with one hand, while the other reached for hairpins. While Nancy buttoned her shoes, Grace hooked up her blouse, and then she fled, for

chapel would begin in a minute. Left alone, Nancy swept the litter on her dresser-top into her bag, stuffed the muddy dimity on top, discovered one white satin slipper under the bed, packed that, and dived into the closet after her suit skirt.

It wasn't there! Nancy searched wildly among the carefully arranged summer wardrobe. It simply wasn't there! In vain her eyes swept the tiny bedroom. She ran out and looked in the study,—even explored Grace's immaculate bedroom. It wasn't there! Then Nancy remembered. It was in her trunk, spread carefully over the mussy top tray, and the trunk was on the way home; for pluming herself on her forehandedness, Nancy had checked it with the first batch that the baggage-master had sent for the night before.

Nancy had intended to take a twenty minutes to ten o'clock train for home. Everybody was at chapel, which wouldn't be over until nine o'clock or after. She couldn't go to chapel without a skirt. She had no skirt; neither, upon hasty investigation in Grace's closet, and then in the twins' and Kittie's, could she find one to borrow. Most of the girls had planned to go straight to the station from chapel. Nancy craned her neck out the window. Yes, both station wagons were already waiting.

If she missed the nine-forty train, when was there another? She hadn't looked, and she had thrown away her time-table; and Miss Marshall, in explaining her plan, had said, "Any girl who misses her train, through her own fault or misfortune, will have to do her work over again, so I advise you all to note several times of possible departure." Nancy hadn't done that. She considered appearing at chapel, and subsequently in the station wagon, in white duck, pink gingham, mussed blue dimity, topped by a short blue coat. Then she considered going down to appeal to Thomas the gardener, who was driving the smaller station wagon. Finally she thought of Mary Ann, and rushed off in search of her.

Mary Ann was sympathetic, but she weighed one hundred and seventy pounds; Cook weighed two hundred. The other maids slept at home and had no skirts with them but the ones they were wearing. By the time Nancy had gathered this information chapel was out, the station wagons were rapidly filling, and Nancy was almost in tears.

"Don't yez be worritin'," comforted Mary Ann. "Set right here in the dinin'-room and wait, while I go tell the dear lady the fix yez do be in. She'll lend yez a skirrut to wear home if she has to be takin' it off her own silf."

Nancy was a little dubious about Miss Marshall's being quite so sympathetic as Mary Ann represented; but she welcomed the suggestion gratefully, and Mary Ann departed.

In a few minutes she was back. "Miss Marshall wants yer to come to th' office."

"Then I've got to put on a dress," cried Nancy despairingly, unfastening hooks as she ran back to her room. By the time she reached the office, the station wagons were driving away, Miss Marshall waving them off from her window. In a minute she turned back to Nancy. "Well, little I-forgot girl," she smiled, "what have you been doing now?"

Nancy explained, and Miss Marshall laughed till she cried at the tragic story.

"Nancy," she said, "I'm afraid you're incorrigible. Miss Dutton is about your height and she has a blue skirt, which, as she's staying here for the vacation, she may be willing to lend for a day or so. Go and ask her, and perhaps —— No, you can't possibly make that train. The next one, you say —— Oh, Nancy, you are incorrigible. Here's a time-table. Don't ever tell that I gave it to you, because you certainly deserve to have to walk all the way to the station after one."

There was not another train till two—and that was a slow one. All the other girls left before

lunch, which Nancy ate in state with Miss Marshall, Miss Dutton, and Miss Armitage. Then Miss Marshall and Miss Dutton announced that they were coming to see her off, and they did, gaily buying her a rose to wear and a magazine to read on the way. Miss Marshall pinned on the rose herself. "Badge of the I-Forgot Girls," she laughed. And Miss Dutton presented the magazine with a solemn warning to Nancy not to get absorbed in it and be carried past her station.

Nancy didn't know how to take their jokes; jokes from your teachers are unusual and rather confusing. So she blushed very pink and looked very pretty, and laid her bag down on the window-ledge at the station, while she looked in her purse for her ticket.

Half an hour later, Nancy, weeping tears of vexation, dispatched a telegram to Miss Marshall: "Bag left somewhere in station. Please don't look at the way it is packed."

When the bag arrived a few days later, a little note was tucked inside the satin slipper.

"DEAR NANCY:

"I've been sorry for you, and proud of you, and ashamed of you, and cross at you, a great many times since you came to Fair Oaks School. But I'm willing to try again just as long as you are.

"And, Nancy, don't be discouraged. The numerous things you forgot that last day hurt nobody but yourself,—and they were very amusing to Miss Dutton and me, who have wished many times that our I-Forgot Girl was here to cheer us up.

"Yours hopefully,
"JANET MARSHALL."

Nancy read the note through twice and then pasted it carefully into the red journal.

"N. B.," wrote Nancy Lee below it: "I should be ashamed to stop trying after that. I thought maybe she liked me that last day, and now I'm sure. So I've certainly got to show her that I'm worth liking.

"Brother Dick says I've improved about keeping my shoes blacked. What a funny thing for a boy to notice!

"Whatever else happens to me next term, I'm pretty sure to have a good time, because I always do, no matter what else happens. So here's to my first Spring Term at Fair Oaks! Want to hear about it, red journal? Well, you probably will."

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